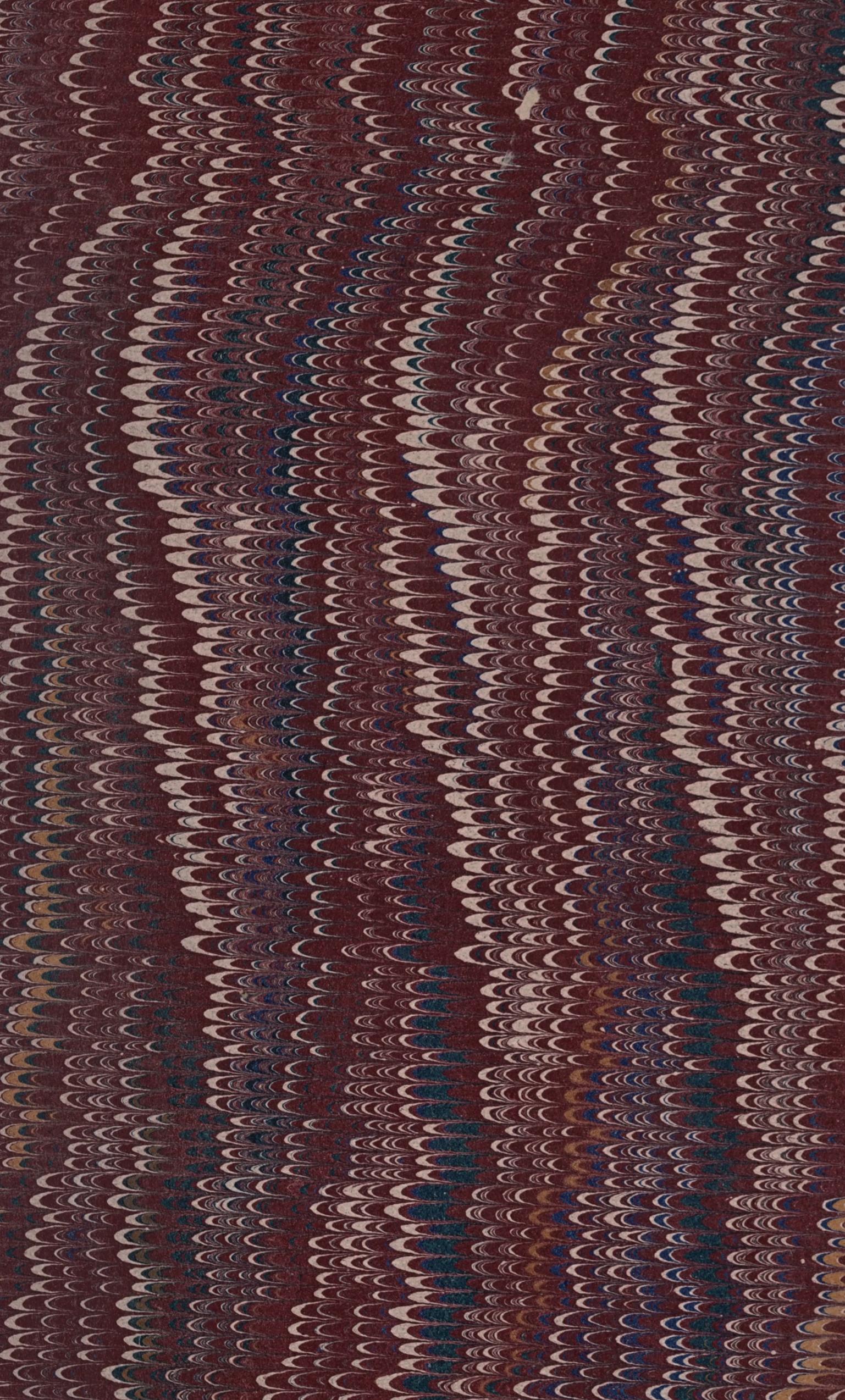


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CHICAGO:

RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,

148, 150, 152 AND 154 MONROE STREET; and

323 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

1886.

S2329
S6362

C O N T E N T S.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.—ST. HELEN'S		1
II.—THE HUNT BALL		15
III.—ARRAH		28
IV.—WINCHESTER BARRACKS		40
V.—“NUTS” PUZZLED		53
VI.—THE RACE		66
VII.—MOLLY ARRIVES AT ARR AH		83
VIII.—EASTWARD HO!		95
IX.—THE SIEGE BEGINS		107
X.—HIS “BAPTISM OF FIRE”		119
XI.—MINE AND COUNTER-MINE		133
XII.—THE SORTIE		145
XIII.—AT CALCUTTA		157
XIV.—ONE RACE TOO MANY		169
XV.—TWIXT TOMB AND ALTAR		185

BAD TO BEAT.



CHAPTER I.

ST. HELEN'S.

SOME half-dozen miles from Maidstone, and standing a little off the London road, might be seen a many-gabled red brick mansion, which, from the well-wooded park in which it stood and the ample range of stabling that lay adjacent to it, to say nothing of conservatories, well-kept gardens, et cetera, all gave promise of much comfort and no little opulence on the part of the proprietor. A house of the Queen Anne period, which had been gradually patched and added to, in order to suit modern requirements; at the present time the inside fully justified the appearance of the exterior. St. Helen's looked the abode of a man with whom the world ran easily, and Christopher Cheviott had certainly had a pleasant time of it in this life. A cheery, middle-aged man, not only fond of field sports, but taking a

lively interest in pretty well everything that was going on, now engaged in fierce political argument over his port, now threatening the direst penalties of the law from the Maidstone bench to some offender against the game laws, now holding his own very respectably when hounds were running, and anon the life and soul of a country dance at the Hunt ball, Mr. Cheviott plunged with a will into everything he undertook. As some of his cronies said : "It makes one feel young again to see Kit Cheviott go down the middle." He had never married ; whether the right woman had never come his way, or whether he honestly thought

"That the bachelor bees have the best of the hive," I don't know, but the fact remains, Kit Cheviott had turned fifty, and was still unmarried. However, the young ladies of the neighbourhood had no cause to complain, and numberless were the pleasant parties that were assembled under the hospitable roof of St. Helen's. He was a staunch supporter of the Maidstone balls, and invariably filled his house with a perfect cohort of young men, and he not only expected but took good care these young men should do their duty.

Two men were playing in the billiard-room this chill January evening, one of whom, apparently, from the conversation, had no great wish to exchange the inside of the house for the out again that night.

"That's five more to me, Nuts," said the striker, a tall, dark, good-looking fellow, who might almost have been pronounced handsome, except for one thing, to wit, a somewhat unpleasant hardness about the face. You could fancy him not likely to yield to any weakness, and very stern and pitiless in his anger "I suppose," he continued, as he made another cannon, "there's no getting off going to this confounded foolery to-night?"

"No, don't you flatter yourself on that point, my boy. Kit Cheviott don't quite feed you for nothing. He does you well, but he expects you to shake your legs freely to-night."

"I hate balls, it's an awful bore, but I suppose one must go."

"Come, I say, Denton, I've known you go to balls, and apparently extract a very decent amount of entertainment from them. It is true you're a lazy beggar, and would always rather sit out than dance."

"It's all very well, Master Nuts, where one

knows people, but it's my first visit down here."

"And a very jolly crib it is, too. It's not my first by a good many, and I trust it won't be my last. Bless you, you will enjoy it when you get there. There are always lots of pretty girls in the 'hop countries. I suppose hops, pretty girls and lady birds go together."

"That was about as easy a cannon as ever I saw muffed," laughed Denton, "philosophising, and billiards don't go together."

"Well, I own that last was a pretty bad miss," replied Mr. Robert Nuthall, for such was that gentleman's true patronymic, but none of his intimates ever dreamed of addressing him in that wise.

He was just the very man who would be called "Bobby" or "Nuts." You could not fancy him being addressed as Nuthall by anybody who knew him at all well. A slight, sandy-haired boy with keen grey eyes, and a somewhat snub nose; a more precocious urchin never joined Her Majesty's —th than this rather "plain-headed" ensign. At the same time, during the two years that he had been a soldier, nobody had ingratiated himself more with his comrades than "Nuts." He was full of "go," and full of fun, per-

fectly imperturbable, and gifted with an effrontery unsurpassed amongst the children of Adam.

Suddenly there was a sound of laughter, a trampling of feet, and then half-a-dozen men, headed by their jovial host, burst into the billiard-room.

"Ha! here you two fellows are," exclaimed Kit Cheviott. "Hurry up your game, please, and then we'll have a pool. We all want our revenge on Master Bobby there, who robbed us all last night disgracefully."

"Don't you chaff a poor innocent like that, Squire. The way these unprincipled marauders went for this unfortunate orphan last night, you can't imagine. If you had been here to see Denton, I am sure you would have interfered."

"Yes," laughed one of the new-comers, "I think you would, but it would have been on behalf of the pillaged—not the pillager. The way that young robber doubled us, shot us, and dribbled us into the pockets last night was disgusting."

"Nuts has a very tidy idea of pool," rejoined Denton, as he made a scientific losing hazard off the red. "There, that's game! and now the sooner we start a pool the better." But as he spoke Denton put his cue

back in the rack, and turning to Cheviott, said :

“Do you expect a large ball to-night?”

“Pretty much the same as usual, I suppose,” rejoined the host. “About a hundred and fifty or thereabouts, but I think you’ll own we can show you a few pretty girls. The three Miss Lyddells would take a good deal of beating anywhere; and I am told they have a very pretty cousin staying with them to boot. However, come along and take your ball, we can talk over the evening’s campaign at dinner.”

“Thanks, no,” replied Denton. “I’ve got two or three letters that I must write before the post goes out, and so I won’t join you.”

“As you like,” replied Mr. Cheviott. “Halloo, brown upon green, that’s me,” and the host was at once lost in the intricacies of pool.

Leaving the billiard-room, Denton promptly made his way to his own chamber, and having exchanged his heavy boots for slippers, threw himself into an easy-chair, and began to indulge in reverie.

Dick Denton was a man whom his regiment never could quite make out. A hard, reticent, self-reliant man, although upon excellent terms with his comrades, he had no great

friends amongst them. It was not that he held at all aloof from them, far from it. He took his part in all that was going on, and had proved himself good at most things when he took the trouble to try. He was no gambler, though he was admittedly far away the best whist and écarté player in the corps, and they all honestly owned that none of them could touch him across country. What he was as a soldier his comrades would have been puzzled to decide. That he knew his work well enough there could be no doubt, but he usually performed it in the contemptuous fashion of a man rather bored by the whole thing. But it was the hard, cynical side of his character that always forbade men being intimate with Dick Denton. It would have required considerable courage to unbosom oneself to the somewhat saturnine captain. True, when he had been appealed to he had been no niggard of shrewd advice and more practical help if needed ; but then he very seldom was appealed to. His brother officers would grumble out their griefs and difficulties to each other over their evening pipes, but none of them ever thought of opening their hearts to Denton. Stay ! there was one exception. The precocious "Nuts." That young gentleman was constantly in scrapes of

some sort, and, to the amazement of the corps, he generally trotted off with his troubles to Denton. It was perhaps the very novelty of the thing that attracted the latter, but certain it was that the only man in the regiment who ever informally dropped into Denton's quarters was Bobby Nuthall, and that young gentleman had shown much wisdom in the selection of his mentor ; there was not a shrewder headpiece in the regiment than Dick Denton's.

"Rather monotonous," he muttered, "this perpetual round of garrison life I am getting very tired of it. To be a soldier and never to have seen service seems in these days contemptible. However, such has been my luck. I exchanged from India into this corps because I looked upon myself as bound to go to the Crimea, and no doubt I should have done if the war hadn't finished with the fall of Sebastopol. Now I suppose there's another long spell of peace before us. Indeed, I have left the country where one is most likely to see service. There's always the chance of a fight springing up in India. Well, I must write these letters. What a bore this ball to-night is ! However, I am bound to say Cheviott has given us three rare good days' shooting to balance it."

In the billiard-room, meanwhile, an uproarious pool was going on, and the leader of all the chaff and laughter was undoubtedly Bobby Nuthall. That precocious young gentleman played rather better than most of his opponents, moreover was playing with good luck, and was merciless in his raillery as he pocketed his adversaries' six-pences.

"What have you entered for the Hunt Steeplechase, Cheviott?" enquired a fair man, whose last "life" had just been taken by the invincible Bobby.

"Well, I don't know what to think about it," replied the Squire. "Old Trumpeter is a good horse, and would go very near winning it again if I had only a good man to ride him, but to find a jockey is always a trouble."

"Put him in, Squire. Put him in, Squire!" cried the irrepressible "Nuts." "I'll see that there is someone to ride him."

"Why, you don't mean yourself?" exclaimed Cheviott. "Remember, Master Bobby, I've known you from your school-boy days, and without saying anything against your horsemanship——"

"Mr. Cheviott," interrupted Nuthall with mock solemnity, "no disparagement on my

horsemanship. What will anyone lay me against Trumpeter winning if he is left in my hands?"

"If, by your hands, you mean that you will ride him, I'll lay you eight ponies this minute."

"No, Sandeman, I don't quite mean that; but if the Squire will trust me with his management I'll see Trumpeter has a good man on him in March."

"If you promise to find a jockey, I'll enter the horse," said Cheviott.

"And I'll lay you the eight ponies all the same," said Sandeman, "there's sure to be a large entry, and I think that grey of mine will, at all events, hold Trumpeter safe, Squire."

"He's a very nice horse," rejoined Mr. Cheviott, "but I'll stand by my own stable. But I'll tell you what, if young Micklam enters and rides that brown mare of his, I think he'll probably beat us both. And now it is time to dress for dinner."

As they went upstairs, three or four enquiries were put to Nuthall as to who was the jockey he had in his eye; but that young gentleman at once affected the manner of one possessed of a mighty secret, and refused the slightest information on that subject.

Having finished his letters, Denton commenced his toilet, and as he did so, could not help glancing back at his past life. He was a disappointed man as regards his profession, his comrades mistook him greatly when they fancied that he was not a thorough soldier at heart. He was not only that, but an ambitious one to boot. Joining a regiment in India as a mere stripling, he had thrown himself into all the sports of that country with the keenest avidity. He had spent weeks camping out in pursuit of big game, he had slain the lord of the jungle, and taken many a spear pig-sticking, and, for a time, enjoyed his life keenly. The first thing that awoke the genuine fire of soldiering within him and made him enthusiastic about his profession, was the outbreak of the Crimean War. The idea of England being involved in another great continental war had never crossed his mind. He had looked upon India as the one part of her dominions in which there was any likelihood of real fighting being seen, and now a strong desire possessed him to be one of that army that was assembling on the shores of the Black Sea. He could see no possible means of gratifying this wish. To exchange, standing as he did at the top of the list of subalterns, was to throw away all

chance of promotion, and forfeit the results of close upon ten years' service. No, come what would, he was bound to hang on with his present corps, till he had attained his company. But no man followed the accounts of the campaign with keener interest than Dick Denton. At last came the story of the Alma, and then his feverish anxiety to be in the Crimea grew almost insupportable. He chafed and fretted, so that even his comrades could not help wondering what had come to one ordinarily so self-contained as Denton. He hung on all the early details of the siege and his eyes sparkled when he read of the glorious stand of Inkermann.

"To think!" he exclaimed, "that one should be tied here by the leg, when there is such work as that going on." But in the spring of the following year came the long looked-for promotion. And once in the "*Gazette*," Denton lost no time in applying for leave home. Once there, he set to work to either exchange or get transferred to a regiment in the Crimea; but all this took time, and ere he had effected his object, the battle of the Tchernaya had been fought, it was patent to men versed in military matters that the allies' grip on Sebastopol was tightening rapidly, and Denton succeeded in

getting no further than Malta before the famous fortress fell. With that terminated all Denton's chance of going to the Chersonese, and at the time of the commencement of our story his regiment was quartered at Winchester.

It was a very sore subject with Denton that he should have missed being in the campaign at all, the corps he had exchanged into had been in the Crimea since the commencement, and nearly all its officers were decorated. Another thing, too, rather galling to a proud man such as Denton was, those of his own rank being so very much his junior in point of years. Promotion had been very quick with the Crimean men, while in the corps from which Denton had exchanged it had been rather slow. His bad luck rather rankled, he was always harping upon it, and disappointment had made him a more reserved man than he was naturally. All these thoughts ran through his head as he put the finishing touches to his toilet. "Ah!" he thought, "I wonder whether I shall ever see India again! I don't think I should care to go back there now. As for active service, that is a thing that I suppose I never shall see. My luck is too bad. Unlucky devils like myself seem

destined never to assist in extinguishing a conflagration. The fire is always out before we can get to it."

Could Denton, as he went down the staircase, have looked into the future, he would have seen that the fruition of his desires was very near at hand, and that he was destined to recall this night to his mind amidst all the grime and smoke of battle, with the bullets hissing fiercely by his ears and the sabres gleaming redly around him.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUNT BALL.

ON the outskirts of Maidstone stood a substantially-built villa, called “The Mulberries,” the name acquired, probably, from the fact that there were two or three of those trees in the well-kept pleasaunce. This was the residence of James Lyddell, the great brewer; the Lyddells had supplied Maidstone and the surrounding neighbourhood with beer now for three generations, and, as is well known, brewing is a prosperous industry with which much money is to be made. James Lyddell, indeed, was a wealthy man, and dispensed the good things of this life to those around him in no niggardly fashion. His daughters, handsome girls in the full enjoyment of youth and animal spirits, mixed freely in all the gaieties that were going on, and it need scarcely be said, were not likely to miss attendance at a ball taking place no distance from their own gate. At the present moment they are both busy in the room of their cousin and guest, Miss Mary Lepel, more com-

monly known as Molly Lepel, after her famous namesake, assisting her to put the last touches to her toilet.

"There, Molly," said the elder, as she fastened the flower in her dress, "I think you'll do now; I'm sure you look lovely."

Miss Lepel surveyed herself critically in the pier glass for some few minutes, and was, apparently, well satisfied with what she saw there, and certainly with due reason. Miss Lepel was an unmistakeably pretty girl, with a profusion of dark brown hair, and deep grey eyes, at this moment dancing with fun. Her cousins were both counted good-looking girls, but I think there could be no two opinions that Miss Lepel completely eclipsed them.

"Well, Bella," she said, at length, "I think I'm looking my best, and I hope so. I want to be a success at my last ball in England."

"That you're sure to be," replied Bella. "You will be the belle of the room to-night. Now it's time we went downstairs."

"Ah, here you are, girls!" exclaimed Mr. Lyddell, who was fidgetting about in the hall. "It is time we were off, but come into the drawing-room for a moment, while I have a good look at you in all your splendour."

"Magnificent!" he continued, as he looked them carefully over. "I shall feel excessively proud of my young ladies to-night, and am prepared to bet there's not a middle-aged gentleman there who has charge of such a team as mine. As for you, Molly, you ought to be ticketed 'For India,' and then, if the young men allow you to go, well, I shall be ashamed of the county."

"Thank you, uncle," replied Miss Lepel, saucily; "but perhaps the young man to please my fancy won't be there. If they will only make my ball pleasant to-night, I shall be quite content with them."

A quarter of a hour's drive carried them to the door of the Assembly Rooms, and the strains of the band as they alighted warned them that the ball was in full swing. There was every prospect of its being a good one, they saw, as they entered the room. It was well filled, and had evidently opened with spirit. Still, at present, it looked as if the men were likely to run rather short.

"We're in capital time," whispered Bella Lyddell to her cousin. "There's a good many people who I know are coming not yet arrived. The St. Helen's party is not here, and Julia and I always reckon upon them a good deal. Mr. Cheviott is a very old friend

of ours, and it is so good of him, he always brings a lot of young men Ju and I always declare he tries them beforehand, for they are generally all good dancers. Ah, here comes Mr. Cheviott, and I see he has got Mr. Nuthall, Mr. Sandeman, and another old friend or two, amongst his party."

As for Nuts, he was evidently well known, and was speedily shaking hands right and left. Most of the others, too, seemed to have acquaintances; but Denton, as he had anticipated, knew nobody. Not that that much mattered in the hands of such a host as Kit Cheviott. The Squire, for the first few minutes, was too engrossed in greeting his neighbours, to pay much attention to his own immediate party. They wanted very little looking after, and had all plunged into the thick of the fray at once; but ere long, Denton caught his eye, and Mr. Cheviott at once determined that would never do. Denton was lounging near the doorway, looking on at the whole proceedings with a rather wearied expression on his face. It was a somewhat striking face, and more than one person had asked who the dark, good-looking man was, who seemed so intensely bored with the whole entertainment. No sooner did the then **valse** come to a conclusion, than Mr. Cheviott

made his way to the delinquent's side, and exclaimed :

"Come, Captain Denton, this will never do ; let me find you a partner. I'm sure there are pretty girls enough here to-night. Even you must own that Miss Lepel, who has come with the Lyddells, is hard to beat. I don't think I ever saw a lovelier girl."

"Is that the girl you mean ?" asked Denton. "Yes, I should like to know her. Introduce me, will you ?"

"Certainly," replied the Squire, and he at once took Denton across the room and performed the ceremony, but Miss Lepel was already pretty deeply engaged. Her beauty had attracted attention at once, and other men had been prompter than Denton to solicit a dance from the new star. However, she accorded him a dance, though it was rather low down, and with that Denton was fain to be content, and had it rested with him, he would have been quite satisfied to remain a looker-on till his turn came ; but the Squire had no idea of allowing this, and insisted upon introducing him to two or three other partners ; still, for all that Denton danced but little. He was a connoisseur in female beauty and it suited him better to lounge against the wall and admire this Miss Lepel than to

exert himself as the Squire would have had him do.

He had been struck with Molly Lepel, the moment he entered the room, and admitted at once that she was a very beautiful girl; still he had been in no hurry to make her acquaintance. The charm would probably be all over then, he thought; when he came to talk to her, he should probably find her conversation wearisome. He had been disappointed so often in that way, it was better perhaps to look lazily on, and feast his eyes with admiration of her graceful movements. However, when the time came for his promised valse, he at once claimed his partner.

“Do you live in this part of the country, Miss Lepel?” he inquired as he gave her his arm.

“No, I am only staying with my uncle; paying a farewell visit indeed, before leaving England.”

“Going abroad, I presume,” rejoined Denton. “Not a very nice time of the year for travelling.”

“No, I am going to India to join my father, who holds a good appointment out there. You don’t know the country, I suppose?”

“Very well,” answered Denton quietly. “I

have spent a big slice of my life out there; in fact, it is not yet two years since I left it."

"Did you like it?" she inquired somewhat abruptly.

"Very much for some time," he replied. "You see I am an enthusiast in the matter of sport, and it is certainly a wonderful country for that, but one began to get rather tired of the monotony at last, and then, you see, the stirring times they were having in the Chersonese made us soldiers restless."

"I think I understand," she replied. "You wanted to be in the Crimea; I can fancy that a soldier would have that feeling. Did you succeed?"

"Did I succeed!" he answered as his face darkened. "How do you know that I ever tried to get there?"

"I am sure you did," replied Miss Lepel, "I can see it in your face. Forgive me," she felt intuitively that she was touching on a sore subject.

"I have nothing to forgive, Miss Lepel," he said quietly; "we cannot all have what we wish for in this world, and besides, I might have been one of the many who never came back. The room has a little thinned now, shall we take a turn?"

"Yes," she murmured as he put his arm

round her waist, "but I can imagine a man saying, 'better that, than never to have been there,'" and then Molly gave herself up to the enjoyment of the valse.

It was a good band and they were both good goers. Miss Lepel was fond of dancing, and apt to be somewhat fastidious in the choice of her partners, but as a stranger she had been compelled to take them a little haphazard as regards that particular, this evening, and the result had been one or two bitter experiences. However, as far as that went she was perfectly satisfied on this occasion.

"A mistake, that last conclusion of yours, Miss Lepel; on the principle that the live dog is better than the dead lion, so a man need hardly despair of his career with some years before him. Besides, don't you see," he continued, as they paused, "I am in the position of a man with an untasted pleasure before him, if I may be allowed thus to describe our gladiatorial instincts."

Molly looked at him as he spoke. There was a half-sarcastic smile about his mouth, which the dark moustache only half-concealed, and it flashed across her that Captain Denton's face would be hard and stern in the day of battle. It was a queer thought to cross the girl's mind, but Molly Lepel was

rather an imaginative young lady, though she little dreamt that she was destined to see that face under those circumstances.

"Yes," she rejoined, "after the tremendous experiences we have had lately, one will always regard war as very possible."

"And when do you sail for India?" he enquired.

"In about three weeks. This I believe to be my last dance in England."

"I hope you can spare me one more valse," said Denton. "That was too short."

"I would if I could, with pleasure," replied Miss Lepel. "I am very fond of it, and your step suits mine exactly, which is more than I can say of one or two of the partners I have had to-night; but I am engaged for the next two, and I am afraid we shall be going before there is another, but I will put you down if you like."

Denton thanked her and rejoined :

"Even if our valse doesn't come off, I shall see you again before you go, Miss Lepel, just to say good-bye, and wish you *bon voyage*." And with a bow he consigned her to the care of her uncle.

"She seems rather a nice girl," mused Denton, as he strolled back to his old lounge near the door. "And by Jove, what a sen-

sation she will make at Poonah, Bangalore, or wherever's her destiny. She will beat anything they've got out there, aye from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, I'll lay a hundred. Lepel, Lepel—let's see, where did I know a Lepel? Of course, how stupid of me not to recollect it before. It's an uncommon name, and I wonder it never struck me. I wish I had asked her. She's a daughter of Judge Lepel's, I've no doubt. I knew him a little, when we were quartered in the North-West Provinces. As hospitable a fellow as ever lived, and entertained a good deal. I think I recollect hearing that he was a widower. Well, I don't suppose I'm likely to come across her again, but there will be a sore heart or two on board the ship that takes her to India I'll go bail. Those evenings in the tropics are conducive to much flirtation, when the temptation is not half so fair."

Here Denton's reflections were cut short by the appearance of Bobby Nuthall. That restless young gentleman was in a state of excitement.

"Look here, Denton," he exclaimed. "I want to speak to you for a moment. I have promised to find Cheviott a jockey for his horse. He's going to enter old Trumpeter

for the Hunt Steeplechases which come off in March. Will you ride for him?"

"Go on," replied Denton quietly, "that's not the whole of your story; what have you been about just now?"

"Well, I've backed him for a good deal of money. It all began in the billiard-room after you went upstairs to write letters, and I took Sandeman's eight ponies about him there. Just now I went down to the supper-room to get some champagne after my meritorious exertions up here, and there are a whole lot of fellows there, talking over the race, and finally we settled down to some smartish betting over it. They chaffed me a good bit about it, and the end of it was, I backed the horse three or four times more; in fact, I've got more money on it, a good deal, than I like, and if you don't ride for me, I shall be in an awful mess——"

"I don't as a rule care about riding a horse of which I know nothing," replied Denton, "and I've never seen this one, except in the stable. He struck me there as a very nice weight-carrying hunter, but I should think he hadn't speed for steeple-chasing. What makes you and the Squire think he has a chance?"

"Why he won it once before."

"Yes, but they will only put extra weight upon him for that. However, I'll tell you what I'll do for you, I'll ride him, and take part of your bets off your hands. I always like to have an interest in my mount."

Bobby Nuthall was profuse in his gratitude. He was a wicked little creature in one respect, much given to having what he called a "flutter," which meant a little bit of gambling. This evening, excited by the chaff, he had certainly put more money upon Trumpeter than was prudent for a young gentleman of his means, and Denton had once or twice before helped him out of similar scrapes. Having promised to do his best for Mr. Cheviott's horse, Denton dismissed the subject from his mind, and his thoughts once more reverted to Miss Lepel. He wondered where they had got in the programme, and whether there was any chance of his obtaining that dance she had promised him.

Another minute and that question was solved for him, for that young lady, on the arm of her cavalier, stood before him, and extending her hand said :

"I must wish you good-bye, Captain Denton; we are going now, and our valse must remain an engagement unfulfilled."

"I am sorry," replied Denton : "but it is possible we may meet again, and then I shall ask permission to claim it."

"Not very probable, I am afraid," she rejoined smiling.

"Oh, I don't know!" he replied. "Mine is a very vagrant profession, and takes us all over the world. Unlikely though it looks now, we may meet again. However, I suppose for the present I must say good-bye."

Another minute and she was gone, and despite his last words Denton wondered very much whether he ever should see Molly Lepel again. Mercifully on these occasions we always do expect that we shall meet again. It would be too sad, if when parting with the many pleasant people we meet with on our way through the world, we thought we were bidding them adieu for ever. And yet, how often it is so.

CHAPTER III.

ARRAH.

A GLORIOUS night in the tropics, the heavens are gemmed with stars, and the pale moonlight shimmers down upon the white walls of the group of bungalows that constitute the little cantonment of Arrah. Its inhabitants are apparently at rest, and nothing breaks the stillness but the occasional bark of a pariah dog, or the sharp cry of some prowling jackal. Stay! From behind the jalousies of one of the larger buildings, comes the sound of voices and occasional bursts of laughter. Lounging in a comfortably furnished dining-room were three men in all the enjoyment of conversation and tobacco. There was one peculiarity about the little gathering—to wit—as far as man could judge, there was no military man amongst them.

“Yes, that was a good bag, Fawcett,” remarked a good-looking middle-aged man, “but you are always so fortunate when you go out alone in the jungle.”

“Quite right, Judge,” rejoined the other,

good-humouredly. “I hate to have a fellow taking notes of my stories. Embellishment is like a sauce to your wild duck. An anecdote is flavourless without it. There’s Cole there, will serve up the mere dry bones of his day’s doings. But don’t we all admit that the least reliable history is the best reading.”

“Ingeniously put, sir,” said the Judge. “You can take a case.”

“It’s all very well,” remarked Cole, “but in practical life, we want facts. Think what a mess Fawcett would make of my business with his little inaccuracies. In engineering, we require things correct to an inch.”

They were a capital contrast these two men, and the source of unfailing amusement to Judge Lepel. Fawcett was a popular man in spite of his peculiar weakness. He was no utterer of malicious untruths, but about his own exploits of flood and field, he was a veritable Munchausen. Nobody ever believed his accounts of what he had done either shooting or pig sticking. He knew it and laughed at it. But he had an ineradicable disposition to hoax his hearers on these points. If his stories were not altogether true, he told them well, and as he said himself. “Who looks for veracity in an anecdote?”

“Let me see,” said Fawcett, “you expect

Miss Lepel in a day or two now, do you not?"

"Yes, she is on her way up country, and should be here to-morrow or the day after. I camped here on purpose to pick her up and show her a bit of tent life to start with."

"Yes, Judge, but it wasn't likely you were going to remain in that camp while I had a comfortable bungalow within a quarter of a mile of you. No, here you stay, as long as you are in reasonable distance of Arrah."

"It's a pity, Judge, you should have chosen this time for Miss Lepel to come out to you. There are ugly stories about of discontent amongst the Sepoys at Dina-pore."

"I have been in India this thirty years, on and off, and we have had mutinies before, I don't think this is likely to spread much further. The authorities seem to have been somewhat supine in their action, instead of putting it down with a high hand, and the consequence is, we have for the time lost Delhi. Still, I own I shall be very glad to see Molly safe here."

"Well, I hope I may be all wrong, Judge," rejoined Cole quietly, "but I wish that my wife was in England just at present."

"You old croaker!" exclaimed Fawcett. "You are always taking the gloomiest views of things. When we go shooting you always prophesy the worst of luck."

"Well, I can't shoot like you, you know, more especially with *your own peculiar weapon*."

"A fair hit," cried the Judge. "Now a certain man drew a bow at a venture——"

"You villain," laughed Fawcett. "Have some more claret or a brandy and soda, if you like it better, but no more of your Jeremiads, 'An thou lov'st me, Hal!'"

"Well, I think I will fill myself a beaker of the more potent fluid. I should like to drink out of that silver goblet, if I may. Let me look at it."

"By all means!" rejoined their host. "Here, boy, a brandy and seltzer for the Sahib."

Cole took the silver cup and examined it for a minute or two previous to holding it out to the servant to be filled. It was a plain, rather handsome goblet, with an inscription on it to the effect that it was "presented to John Fawcett for having saved the life of Edward Kennard in June '55."

"Why, Fawcett," continued Cole, "how is it we never heard of this deed of heroism?"

You're not the man to conceal your light under a bushel, and yet you have never told us this story."

"All the better," cried the Judge, "because he is going to do so now."

"I have not the slightest objection," replied the host, with a twinkle in his eye, "and whatever you may think, I beg to remark that this is a perfectly true narrative. Well, in that year," continued Fawcett, "I was down at Bombay. I had gone there to spend my furlough with some old friends who had just come out from England. And a very good time we had of it. There was lots going on, dinners and whist at the Byculla Club, the races and balls and dances no end. One of the pleasantest fellows in our little *coterie* was Kennard, but, poor fellow, he was born under a malignant star. Whatever we were about, he always came to grief. If anyone's buggy was kicked to pieces, Kennard was sure to be in it. If anyone came down in a ball-room, you might bet your life Kennard would fall over him; the same at whist, it wasn't that he played so badly, but he was such an unlucky beggar, that we all rather dreaded him as a partner. Well, of course, amongst other things we were bound to go and see the caves of Elephanta, and started a good boat-

full of us for that purpose. It is some little way across the harbour, and there happened to be a good bit of wind, which made the boat lie over slightly. How it happened I don't know, nobody else's hat blew off, but Kennard's suddenly disappeared into the water ; he leant over the gunwale, to snatch at it before it should be out of reach, and in the twinkling of an eye he had followed his hat. The crew were very smart, the sail was down and the oars were out as quick as possible. Still, before we could stop our way and turn round he was some distance astern. Luckily he could swim a little, and we could see him struggling in the water. I got into the bow to be all ready to catch hold of him, the men pulled like demons ; I kept giving him cheers of encouragement, and signalling with my hands to the man at the helm where to steer. He was about beat as we got up to him. I made one grab at him and just missed him. I thought it was all over, and called to them to look out for him astern. Luckily there was a good man there, and this fellow managed to get hold of him. We had pretty hard work to get him into the boat, and he was insensible when we managed it. Well, we set to work, chafed his temples with spirit—I luckily had a flask of brandy in my

pocket—and as he began to show signs of animation, I managed to force a little down his throat. The neat spirit seemed to revive him, and seeing that, I gave him another stiff dose. In a few minutes, thanks to my exertions, I had the satisfaction of seeing him make an attempt to sit up, and hearing him inquire faintly where he was. Ah, Judge, there is a great satisfaction in saving the life of a fellow-creature!"

"But," exclaimed Cole, "you never went in after him, nor were you the fellow that pulled him out of the water. I don't quite see where *you* come in!"

"There you go again, Cole, with your nasty hypercritical remarks. I should like to know where he would have been without that gulp of brandy. It was that that did it."

"And," enquired the Judge, struggling with his laughter, "do you mean to say that Kennard presented you with that cup for saving his life?"

"Most certainly I do. He knew the friendly hand that had administered the spirit. I don't think, somehow," continued Fawcett reflectively, "that he ever *did* quite know who pulled him out of the water."

"And I suppose the Royal Humane Society

have sent you their medal?" said Cole, laughing.

"Well, no," replied Fawcett. "I'm not one of those pushing fellows, you know. Some men are always applying for decorations, whether they have earned them or not. That's not my form."

"But to revert to what we were talking about, before Fawcett began his interesting anecdote. Have you any grounds, Cole, further than bazaar gossip, for saying there is a spirit of disaffection abroad amongst the Sepoys?"

"Most undoubtedly, Judge," replied Cole, rather lowering his voice. "I know for certain, for I was there the other day, that the authorities at Dinapore were excessively uneasy. They say the Sepoys are growing more insolent day by day, and you know very well, Judge, that when the native dares to be insolent to the white man it is an ominous sign of a coming struggle between the races. We only exist here by right of conquest, and that the conquered invariably rise against their masters is an old-world history."

"Yes," remarked Fawcett, "and the whole history of India is simply that of conquest. I don't like, I say honestly, what you tell me about their mistrusting the native troops of

Dinapore. We know the spirit of mutiny is abroad, and that they have had trouble in other places."

"Yes," said Cole, "and now I will tell you another thing. The Commissioner of Patna is as uneasy about his district as they are at Dinapore, but he is a man of tremendous energy, which the general at Dinapore is not, and to prove to you the correctness of my information, you will see a company of Sikhs march into Arrah before forty-eight hours are over at furthest."

Judge Lepel sat very silent after Cole's last remarks. He was not the man to feel nervous about facing a mutiny himself, but he might well look grave when he thought that he had brought his daughter out only to share its dangers and possible horrors. He did not require Cole to point out to him what happened when servile races rose and got the better of their masters, and in this case there would be all the fierce fanaticism of difference of creed to still further embitter the struggle. Cole's quiet resolute tones had at last carried conviction to both his hearers. They had begun by laughing at him, but the scoffers had become believers. Both did know there was a spirit of disaffection abroad in Bengal, but, as was the case at that time

in so many places, people would not believe that it could extend to their own station until the storm actually burst. Cole's positive assertion as to the coming of the Sikhs carried conviction to both his auditors that, at all events, the Commissioner of Patna had doubts about the security of Arrah.

"Well," said Fawcett at length, "so far we've been in this condition, if we have had no soldiers to protect us, we, at all events, have had to dread no mutiny. Now, these Sikhs, perhaps, will prove traitors to their salt."

"No," said Cole, "I don't think that. As for these high-class Sepoys, good soldiers as they have been in the past, I don't think they are in the least to be trusted in the present. If I were in authority I wouldn't leave a musket in their hands. Now, the Sikhs are a very different thing. It's some ten years since we conquered the Punjab, and very hard work, as you know, we found it; but those fellows have accepted our rule ever since. They are splendid soldiers with no sympathy whatever for the Sepoys, we have lots of them in our service, and I think they will stand true to us. Fly at our throats like wild cats they may again, one of these

days, but they'll not join hands with the Sepoys."

"If you are right about the Sikhs, as Fawcett says," remarked the Judge, "we shall have nothing here of the mutiny. But I suppose, if this sort of thing spreads, for instance, should Dinapore go, the mutineers would be quite likely to loot Arrah *en passant*, and we should be perfectly defenceless here".

"Well," said Cole, "I have a wife to take care of, and I've no idea of dying like a sheep myself. I have two houses in my compound, and the smaller one, which commands the other, I've been for some time busily engaged in fortifying; it may be all nonsense, but, as I've told you, I don't like the signs of the times. I don't suppose we could hold out very long, but we certainly could for a few days, with the assistance of these Sikhs, which would give us a chance of being rescued on the one hand, while on the other, if we must die, we should die like men."

"Of course, old man, we must throw in our lots with you; we shall have nothing else to do for it; and though I hope we shall chaff you for a year or two afterwards about your citadel, yet it is possible we may have to thank you for our lives."

"I've a wife to think of, you see," returned Cole, with a sad smile, "and for her sake I daren't neglect a single precaution. If the storm does burst at Dinapore, it will be impossible to say how far it will spread, or what will be the consequences. But wherever these mutineers get the upper hand, those taken alive will envy the fallen their fate."

"Cole," said the Judge, rising, and with a slight quiver in his voice, "I thank you now, though God grant we may never need your citadel. Good God! to think that I should have sent for Molly at this unlucky time."

CHAPTER IV.

WINCHESTER BARRACKS.

A GREAT contrast to our last picture. Instead of a tropic night with the Southern Cross shining high in the sky, we have the Great Bear and the cold stars of the northern hemisphere. It is March, and a bitter nor'-easter whistles round the Winchester Barracks, swirls round the gateway of the "George Inn," suggestive of mulled ale to the ostlers and stable men in the yard, and even seducing some of the young gentlemen of the garrison to drop into the bar of that famous hostelry for a glass of the egg-flip for which it is celebrated. It whistles down the High Street, and makes the hurrying passengers pull up the collars of their coats, and hasten their already rapid steps towards their firesides. It shrieks and frolics round the Cathedral close, but the tombstones laugh it to scorn, and those that lie under them reck little of its chilly blast. The grim old cathedral has seen too many March winds to take much heed of it. It holds its mighty dead

from the time when Winchester was virtually capital of England, from the days when St. Swithin declined to be buried within its walls. Once more the nor'-easter goes whistling round the barracks, making the sentries tramp hurriedly up and down their beats, driving the men into the canteen, filling the ante-room, and bringing together more than one cosy party in the officers' quarters.

Let us take a peep into one of these. A room looking over the big square, comfortably but plainly furnished. The red curtains are drawn across the windows, in one of which stands a writing-table, in the other a window-lounge. There is an easy-chair upon each side of the fire-place, wherein burns a bright and comforting fire. Over the mantel-piece is an elaborate whip-rack, in which whips and sticks of all descriptions figure, tandem whips, hunting crops, relentless, sharp-cutting racing whips, ash plants, and park canes. Two or three racing prints, two or three spirited pen-and-ink drawings and a couple of good engravings decorate the walls. On one side of the fire-place is a neat, well-furnished book-case, on the other a somewhat elaborate pipe-rack surmounts a peculiar arrangement for containing innumerable spurs and boots. Boots and spurs seem as multifarious as

the whips. There are butcher-boots, top-boots, varnished Napoleons, et cetera. Spurs, straight-rowelled, swan-necked box spurs, hunting-spurs, even crane-necked racing spurs. On the sofa lies a well-stained red coat, with corresponding cord breeches beside it. A pair of terribly splashed top-boots, to which the spurs are still buckled, are thrown carelessly on the floor. On the round table in the centre of the room are scattered periodicals, cigar-cases, and a pair of dog-skin gloves. There are a couple of swords in one corner of the room, and a couple of forage-caps, in company with divers other head-gear, share some half-dozen pegs. A fox-terrier lies basking on the hearth-rug. The whole furnishes a picture of mild bachelor sybaritism. Nobody could entertain the slightest doubt but what this is the abode of a soldier and a sportsman. A glance at the book-shelf still further confirms it, where one shelf seems given up to books on military tactics and volumes of the "Racing Calendar."

From the inner room came much splashing, steam, and an odour of tobacco; for Denton, though hardy sportsman as ever faced tiger or rode jealous for first spear, was always luxurious in his tastes when opportunity afforded, and he held that a hot bath with a

cigar was fit crown to a hard day's work. He had had a tedious though not very brilliant day with the H. H. The meet had been distant, and the ride home long. And now, his ablutions being about finished, he was lazily smoking a cigar preparatory to dressing for mess. A sharp tap at the door was twice repeated before it caught his ear.

"Who the devil is it?" he asked angrily, for he was more in the humour to finish his cigar in an arm-chair in front of the fire than to hold converse with his fellows.

"It's me," responded the voice of Bobby Nuthall. "May I come in?"

"Yes," replied Denton. "Come in. Take a cigar if you want one, and sit down. I'll come out and talk to you in a few minutes."

"All right," replied Nuts, and that free-and-easy young gentleman adapted himself to circumstances without further invitation.

A few minutes elapsed, and then Denton, emerging from the adjoining room, lounged leisurely up to the fire-place and said:

"Now young 'un, what is it? What's the matter? Has that old screw of Cheviott's that you and he think so much of broke down?"

"No; I say, Denton, you needn't disparage

the old horse. He's wonderful 'fit,' and I tell you what, I've been touting a bit down there, and if you can only do *one*, you ought to win."

"I understand," said Denton, smiling, "You've discovered there's a 'chaser' entered amongst all these hunters, that looks rather awkward for our money."

"Yes, that fellow Micklam, the horse dealer, has entered one that, though it has never won a steeplechase, he considers quite up to that form. He's a rattling good rider, and will be on it himself."

"Well, 'Nuts,' if that's the one you expect me to do, it will be very awkward unless Micklam has made some mistake about it. I know what it is; when a steeplechaser gets in amongst hunters they're all outpaced. They can't go quick enough even to make him fall. There's nothing but an accident can save us."

"I don't know," replied Mr. Nuthall. "You don't suppose when I heard we had such an awkward antagonist in the field, that I wasn't going to make out all I could about her? They're pretty dark about letting anyone see her gallop, and I'm told that as far as that goes, she's got you all, safe as houses, but I did manage to see Micklam schooling her,

she's a grand fencer, but I've found out one thing, she has a bit of a temper, and if anything happens to upset that, I think you may have a rare chance I saw her the other day take fence after fence without hesitation or mistake, suddenly she came to a little bit of a place, which apparently did not meet her ladyship's approval. She whipped round in a way which would have sent a good many fellows out of the saddle, and it took him a minute or two's coaxing to get the mare over."

"Ah!" said Denton, "there's always a chance against one of that kind, but what's the news in Kent? Did you see anything of the Miss Lyddells?"

"Yes, I saw them once or twice. That pretty cousin of theirs, they told me, sailed for India as she threatened. I've got a message for you from the Squire, he wants us very much to come down a week before the steeplechases. He thinks you would like to give old Trumpeter a gallop or two yourself, and make his acquaintance, not that he's a horse that wants any riding."

"All right," replied Denton, "there's not much doing in this place except the hunting, and we've been unlucky even with that."

"Ah! had a bad day, I suppose," replied

Mr. Nuthall, "I've noticed you always pitch into the place and its inhabitants when that is the case."

"Well, it does rather embitter one," rejoined Denton, laughing. "Now, Master Nuts if you've the slightest intention of attending mess, you had better be off to dress. The first bugle sounded a good quarter of an hour ago."

Mr. Nuthall took the hint, jumped out of his chair, and hurried off to his own quarters.

As soon as Mr. Nuthall had left, Denton drew a small memorandum book from the pocket of his dressing-jacket, and after running his eye over it, muttered: "£1,150! Champagne must have induced you to bet bold that night, Master Bobby; still, £1,150 to £150 is a nice average about one's horse's chance as things go, and I am going halves with you in this. Well! it will be a very nice little stake to pull off. I'm not particularly hard up, but I can do with five hundred odd, as well as most people, besides which, ninety-five pounds, his half of it, if we lose, will be rather a facer for Master Bobby. Well! as long as my most dangerous foe is a bad-tempered one, there is a pretty good chance. I'm jockey enough to know how to upset the equanimity of an animal of that

kind. Yes ! I don't dislike our chance at all." And with that he snapped to the betting-book, and arose to slip on his mess jacket.

Then his thoughts ran into another channel and instead of continuing his toilet, he lounged before the fire, and his memory travelled back over some of his old Indian days. How dreadfully hard hit he had been at Poonah, by little blue-eyed Lucy Wilson, the daughter of the general there. He smiled grimly as he thought what a dust there had been about that flirtation of his ensign days. How he had been wiggled by his own colonel for his presumption, and how Lucy had been stormed at by her parent, for having no proper pride in her position ; how miserable they had both been at the time, and how, when he met her five or six years afterwards, she was a plump little matron, the wife of a collector. Well ! he had troubled his head little about women since then, "but," he muttered as he strolled into his bedroom, "I should rather like to see that Miss Lepel again."

Mr. Nuthall's entrance to the mess-room was the signal for quite a little ovation. That popular young gentleman was hailed by all sorts of familiar epithets.

"What, my Bobbetts," exclaimed one of his brother subs.

"Bobby, my boy, how goes it?" cried another.

"'Nuts,' old fellow, how are you?" said a third. And then there was much handshaking and considerable chaff about the business Nuts had been away about.

They all knew he was managing a horse entered for a steeplechase, and were all under the impression that he was to ride this noble animal himself, and as there was not much belief in Bobby's powers as a horseman, his chances were always much derided by his comrades.

"Is the Jerusalem pony doing nicely?" enquired one.

"Shut up," retorted another, "Bobby has been having a course of lessons from George Fordham."

"You're both wrong," exclaimed another; "he has been trying to insure his life, but I suppose they wouldn't look at it, Bobby. Besides, old man, it would be no use if they did, because your riding a steeplechase would be given as suicide, and the insurance companies don't part over suicides or capital punishment."

"Well, you fellows haven't let your

tongues get rusty since I've been away," retorted Bobby, grinning ; "and what's more, you all display the same passion for talking about what you don't understand as when I left you."

"Nuts is getting sarcastic," rejoined one of his auditors ; "the idea of that ride he has got to take makes him as uncomfortable as Mazeppa."

"'Ill betide the school in which I learnt to ride,' eh, Bobby ?"

"Do hold your gabble, here's dinner," said Mr. Nuthall, as the mess butler announced it. "Come and sit with me at the bottom of the table, and I'll tell you fellows all about it."

And, the keen edge taken off their youthful appetites, Bobby proceeded to explain to some of his cronies what this bit of racing was that he was engaged in.

"You see, you fellows, I ain't quite a fool, and if there's one thing I pique myself upon, it's knowing what I can't do. Now I can have a good deal of fun in my own way after the hounds, but I never delude myself with the idea that I'm a 'customer,' and as for riding in a steeplechase, well, you know I might, but I think it is very improbable ; and I should recommend you to bet against

me if I did. No, the fact is, I was staying down at Squire Cheviott's for that ball, you know, and they were talking over the Hunt Steeplechases, when the Squire said he would enter a capital good horse he has, only he had no one to ride it, and I chipped in and said 'You find the horse, Squire, and I'll find the man.' It was in the billiard-room, and there was such a torrent of chaff sprung upon me at once, that, by Jove, you know, it was quite like being in one's own mess-room, and they began offering all sorts of odds against Trumpeter. At last I shot one of them, saying at the same time 'Mind, I never said that I would ride myself, I only said that I would find a man.' However, after some discussion, the layer agreed the bet should stand."

"Then," exclaimed one of his auditors, "the cock-and-bull story we had got hold of all resolves itself into the fact that you have backed a horse for a steeplechase?"

"Well, not quite. There's a little more than that to tell, Jemmy. You see, we went to the ball that night, and I went in for all the fun of the fair. I knew no end of pretty girls there, and what with the flirting, valsing, and champagne at supper, one felt very 'fit.' Well, after a rattling *deux temps*

with one of the best goers I ever danced with, I went down to the supper-room in search of a ‘modest quencher.’ There were a lot of fellows there, all talking about this steeplechase, and betting about it. They chaffed me a good deal about what they were pleased to denominate my horse, and the end of it was I made a fool of myself and backed him for a hatful of money. A precious deal more than I can afford. And I can only say if he don’t win, you may as well put this child on orderly duty for a twelvemonth, for he’ll have no money left to go about with.”

“ Well, Nuts, it strikes me the first thing to be done about getting out of this scrape is to find a jockey.”

“ I’ve done that. If I hadn’t had a right good man in my eye I should never have made that first bet. As for the others, they were the results of champagne and high spirits.”

“ Who have you got? Who’s to ride, Bobby?”

“ Well, I can’t tell you that. I am not sure that he would like it, and as it’s deuced good of him to help me out of this scrape, I’m bound to keep silence on that point.”

“ Well,” said Jemmy Palliser, “ it is rather a bore, standing a ‘perisher,’ I admit, but

still, Nuts, with a right good man and a right good horse, I don't see that you've much need to be unhappy about it. I daresay some of us here could help you out a little. I can't afford to bet much, but just for the fun of the thing, I shouldn't mind standing a 'tenner' in your book.

"Nor I," said one or two more.

"Well, it's awfully good of you fellows," replied Bobby, "and if things had been as I believed when I made those bets, I'd have thanked you gaily, and could have honestly said, I thought you'd have a real good show for your money. I have since found out that there's a steeple-chase mare amongst the entries, and bar accidents, she is much too good for the rest of the field."

"Never mind, Nuts," replied Palliser, "let's piously trust she will break her rider's neck at an early stage of the proceedings. He must be a 'sweep' to have spoiled sport, by entering an animal of that class."

"Well, Palliser, let us trust your wish may be accomplished; in the meantime, pass the claret, and let us drink success to Trumpeter;" and that rite performed with due solemnity, the party broke up, and adjourned to the adjoining room, in pursuit of a cigar.

CHAPTER V.

“‘‘NUTS’ PUZZLED.”

THERE is pretty much the same party assembled round the dinner-table at St. Helen’s, as there was on the evening of the Hunt Ball. The steeple-chase is to come off the next day, and the conversation may be described emphatically as horsey. Sandeman, the Squire, and one or two more of his guests, have horses running, and each is convinced his nomination would win, were that brown mare of Mr. Micklam’s out of it. Everybody’s voice is raised in terrible condemnation of that luckless horse-dealer.

“It’s just like a beggar of that sort,” growled Sandeman, “to go and enter a clipper like that, and spoil all our fun. It promised to be as sporting an affair as we’ve had in the neighbourhood for many a year ; it would have been a real open race with Kathleen out of it. Don’t you think so, Squire?”

“Yes,” replied Cheviott ; “and if you recollect, I warned you in the billiard-room

on the night of the ball, that that mare of Micklam's was pretty good, though I'll own I had not the faintest idea so good as I now hear she is. In short, Captain Denton," continued the Squire with old-fashioned politeness, "I should never have thought of asking you to ride my old horse, had I been aware that you had anything of that class against you."

Denton had taken very little part in the conversation so far. He sat sipping his claret, and listening to the babble of tongues around him, as if he really had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand. There had been considerable wagering amongst the *convives*, but it had taken the form of backing one horse against another in their places. Everybody seemed to look upon it as a foregone conclusion, that Mr. Micklam's Kathleen must win. Thus directly appealed to, he replied :

"I don't know, Squire; I've seen too much of racing to believe in these extraordinary 'good things.' I have laid one hundred to thirty *on* myself, and paid it before now. You all think this is a foregone conclusion, and, as far as I can make out, only upon the grounds that Kathleen has the heels of us all, and that her owner declares she is steeple-chase class. Of course, speed is the great

thing, but it's not quite everything, when you come to three miles across country. I can only say, I will take five to one about Trumpeter to some money, if anybody likes to lay it."

"Well, Captain Denton," exclaimed a somewhat boisterous, red-faced man, at the bottom of the table, "you can have five fifties if you like."

"You may put it down twice, Mr. Ingleton, if you choose," was the cool reply.

"No, thank you," and for the first time the prestige of Kathleen was shaken.

None of them had ever seen Denton ride, none of them knew much about him, but he was one of those men who gave the idea of being bad to beat at whatsoever he might choose to back himself. One thing they had seen him do, and that was shoot, and that he was a fine shot admitted of no dispute. But Denton was one of those men who always impressed his fellows with the notion of power. In whatever he might mix with them, it seemed only natural that he should take the lead; and in this case, although there was nothing to justify them in regarding him as an authority, yet the doubt he had expressed regarding Kathleen's ultimate triumph had somehow communicated con-

fidence to his auditors, and Sandeman was encouraged to take the odds about his own horse from Mr. Ingleton, who was making a book upon the race.

As for Bobby Nuthall, he sat transfixed at Denton's sayings and doings. Since that conversation in the barrack room at Winchester, Denton had persistently declined any discussion on the subject, meeting all Mr. Nuthall's overtures in that way, and they were numerous, with a curt "Don't bother, Nuts, I'll see about things when the time comes." Since he had been at St. Helen's he had also somewhat irritated the Squire with his apparent want of interest in Trumpeter. He had gone down to see him the day after he had arrived there, scanned him narrowly, and then said he would just put his leg over him. He then cantered him in the park, and taking him outside larked him over a few fences, and jumping off when he came into the stable yard, simply remarked: "Nice hunter, Squire, and I daresay will run honest as far as his capabilities go."

As for Mr Cheviott's old stud groom, he simply snorted with indignation; that the best hunter in their stud should be spoken of so contemptuously, was a thing that roused much indignation in his breast.

"He did not believe that soldier chap could ride at all," he remarked to his assistants, "These military gents are all very well. Oh, yes, bless yer. They're as neat as new pins, from their shiny boots to their white ties and horseshoe pins. They dresses the character all very nice, but when it comes to going for the stuff, I likes one who looks a bit more of a workman."

Mr. Nuthall, as has been before remarked, was possessed of astuteness beyond his years. He argued with himself that Denton was not the man to make this unexpected demonstration in favour of his mount, without excellent reason. He knew that Denton was as cool, clear-headed a man as ever stepped, little likely to be carried away by emotion at any time, but never in any matter connected with the turf. He knew, too, which none of his brother officers did, for Denton was a reticent man, and not given to talk of his exploits by flood or field, that Denton had been one of the crack race riders of India, and that about anything connected with that diversion he was a wonderfully shrewd judge.

"Now," argued Master Bobby, as he silently sipped his claret, "Denton must have discovered something during the last day or two. What can it be? As for his having found out

hidden virtues in Trumpeter, that can't be the case, for he has never even given him a gallop, and riled the Squire not a little by his contemptuous indifference as to the training of the old horse, but all the same, Denton is not the man to offer to back Trumpeter for another hundred in the face of that mare of Micklam's, unless he knew something." And while Nuts was still cudgelling his brains as to what that something could be, the Squire rose, and suggested an adjournment to the billiard room.

It was the fashion at St. Helen's, at these bachelor parties, to eschew the drawing-room altogether. Kit Cheviott generally gathered his guests after dinner in the billiard room, where they consumed tobacco *ad libitum*, and amused themselves with pool or cards, for there was a card table placed at one side of the fire-place, as they pleased, and Nuts thought that in this break-up of the party he should get an opportunity of questioning Denton. The latter elected to join the whist table, but Mr. Nuthall contrived to get hold of him for one moment, and observed, "You seem rather to fancy old Trumpeter's chance after all."

"The horse looks very well, and is a nice fencer," rejoined Denton curtly, as he drew a

card at the whist table. "Well, he don't mean to tell me much, that's pretty evident," thought Mr. Nuthall. Even during the pool playing, Bobby's mind still ran upon Denton's mysterious proceedings. He had barely noticed it at the time, but he recollects now that the Captain had disappeared immediately after luncheon, and had not been seen again till dinner. He had thought nothing of it, but he recollects now that the Squire had enquired two or three times what had become of Denton, and that the latter on his re-appearance had only muttered something about having been busy writing letters, and then going for a solitary stroll. Nuts, indeed, was so dreadfully exercised in his mind about Denton's incomprehensible doings that he committed two or three solecisms at pool, somewhat galling to a young gentleman who piqued himself upon his extreme proficiency in that game. He played upon the wrong ball, and missed such an extremely easy shot at Sandeman's as to provoke a roar of laughter, and inquiries as to whether they were in partnership.

But the whist table breaks up, the pool comes to an end, and there is a general adjournment in pursuit of slippers and smoking jackets previous to repairing to the smoking

room for a final cigar. Mr. Nuthall could stand it no longer, but made his way promptly to Denton's room.

"Well, Nuts, what is it?" enquired the captain.

"I say, aren't you coming down," enquired Bobby, upon seeing that Denton had made no attempt, as yet, to change his dress-clothes.

"No," replied the other. "I've had one cigar to-night, and too much tobacco and too much brandy and soda is bad for the wind. I'm not riding my first race, recollect, by many a chalk, and I mean old Trumpeter to have every chance I can give him to-morrow, and am not going to fall into the mistake of being beat before my horse, but I'll tell you what you can do for me, and a bit for yourself too. If there's any more betting you may back Sandeman's horse, as far as fifty pounds, if they will lay fours."

"Back Sandeman!"

"Yes, Nuts; don't manifest astonishment, but simply do the commission you are entrusted with, if you have the chance."

"But what have you heard?" exclaimed Mr. Nuthall, utterly bewildered.

"I haven't so much heard, as I've seen. I've not thrown the three or four days I've been here away; I saw Micklam's mare take

her final gallop at seven o'clock this morning. They have galloped her till she is as dry as a biscuit ; she'll last, because she is so much better class than the others, but her temper won't. She was fretful and irritable this morning, she is over-trained and she'll never get round the course to-morrow. Training always finds out a queer tempered one, more especially when it's overdone. We ought to back Sandeman a little, just to save ourselves. If any one beats me to-morrow it will be he. And now, good-night. I was up deuced early this morning, remember, to see Kathleen gallop, and feel like doing a good sleep."

Mr. Nuthall made his way to the smoking room, cogitating deeply upon what he had been told. The first thing that was clear to him was, that having backed a horse in reckless fashion for more than he could afford, he could have selected nobody better than Denton to pull him out of the scrape.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself, "if any body could make old Trumpeter win to-morrow, it's Denton. Fancy his finding out when Kathleen took her gallops, and being up at unholly hours to see her do them! Well, I must just do his bidding to-night, if I can manage it. These fellows are quite likely to begin betting again over their 'baccy."

And with this sage reflection, Mr. Nuthall opened the smoking-room door, and proceeded to ensconce himself in an arm-chair, behind one of his host's biggest Partagas. With the exception of Denton, the whole party were gathered there, in every description of broidered slipper and gaudy smoking raiment. Sandeman, especially, was particularly brilliant in a coat of many colours, which represented those of his racing jacket, and with the crest of the Sandeman's blazoned in gold on the toes of his dark blue velvet slippers. He was a good horseman, and one of the hardest riders in the Hunt, but his experience "between the flags" was next to nothing. He was a man with considerable belief in himself, and had no reason to think that he would be called upon to encounter anybody possessing much more science than himself in the art of jockeyship on the morrow. Mr. Micklam no doubt owned a very superior mare, but Mr. Micklam, although he had certainly won a steeplechase, had had no very great practice in race riding.

"Yes," said Ingleton, "I give you my word I believe the story is quite true. Jim Hall has done some pretty 'cute things on the turf, not to say rum things, but he never did anything smarter than this. It was at a steeple-

chase down Croydon way, and Jim was riding one not backed for a shilling, one that was only started just to get a bit of weight off. There were six or seven runners, and blessed if they didn't all come to grief with the exception of Hall and Tom Beamish, the professional. Well, when Jim saw himself left in front, with only Beamish alongside him, as they were coming across a grass field, he said, 'Go, on Tom, I'm not trying.' 'Bless your soul, sir,' was the reply, 'my orders are not to win on any account.' 'Then, damme, I'm off,' replied Jim, and, before Beamish knew where he was, Jim Hall had pitched out of his saddle, and was lying on his back in the middle of the grass field."

Several anecdotes of this description followed. Indeed, the conversation seemed to run more upon successful rascality than legitimate sport, but, as yet, there were no signs of any further betting. An old hand would have known better than to disturb Camarina, but Nuts was too impatient to discharge himself of his commission to wait. Undue anxiety to back a horse invariably rouses the suspicion of the layers, and a corresponding shortness in the proffer of odds. Bobby's enquiry as to what Mr. Ingleton

would lay against The Fiddler (Sandeman's horse) aroused immediate attention.

"Why, what on earth are you going over to the enemy for?" enquired the Squire, laughing.

"Well! I'm blessed!" ejaculated Mr. Sandeman. "I fancied you didn't think I was in it with Trumpeter."

"I'll lay you three to one," replied Mr. Ingleton. "What will you have it to?"

"It's not enough," replied Bobby; "I want another point."

"Mr. Nuthall," replied the amateur bookmaker with assumed solemnity, "it's my impression that you're in possession of superior information, and I decline to spring a point"

Bobby cogitated a minute. He was inexperienced in working a commission, however small, but suddenly a bright idea struck him. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll take your hundred to fifty, Mr. Ingleton, The Fiddler beats Kathleen."

"You can have that," was the reply, and the speaker duly noted the transaction in his betting book

"Well, Sandeman," said the Squire, "we shall have your horse first favourite at starting."

"I don't know where Nuthall has got his

inspiration from," replied Sandeman, laughing, "but if he is beat to-morrow, it will be simply because he has met a better horse."

He was young you see at the noble pastime, and made no allowance for that great element of luck which attends all racing.

"And now, gentlemen," cried the host, "unless anybody will have anything more to drink, I think we had better go to bed; at all events, I am off there myself."

This produced a general move towards the candlesticks, and chattering gaily over the prospects of the morrow, the party trooped up the stairs, towards their respective bedrooms.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RACE.

ON a slight eminence at the edge of a large grass field, is a roughly constructed wooden building, which is doing duty as a grand stand; it has evidently been run up quickly, and is intended to be a mere temporary erection. To its right is a rough-looking sentry box slightly elevated. This is the judge's box, and from the fence, leading into this field up to the stand, are rude posts and rails, forming the straight run in. On the left is an enclosure dignified by the name of the Ring, and in which, it is supposed, considerable betting will eventually take place. But this is not likely to any great extent. Some three or four local bookmakers, and perhaps some half-dozen small speculators from London, constitute the fraternity upon this occasion. Such wagering as there is—and there is a good deal in a small way—is done among the farmers and spectators themselves. On both sides of the course carriages and vehicles are numerous. Here and there you see a party of lads and lasses in a waggon from which the

horses have been removed. All sorts of queer shandrydans, tax carts, whitechapels, lumbering old flys, run nearly the whole length of the rails. There is much mirth, and much laughter, and whatever horse may win it is clear that the country folks will be pleased with the show and enjoy their outing.

In the ring the sporting farmers had congregated, and the local bookmakers have a busy time. The London men do not fare so well; the bucolic mind is tainted with suspicion, and is loath to bet with the stranger, of whom he knows nothing. One of the farmers expressed the general sentiment when he remarked to his friend :

“Tom Collins, of the Black Bear, is the man for my money, he’s reet as the clock; besides, mun, if he didn’t pay up, we’d wreck his bar for ‘un next Saturday night; but I don’t fancy these Lunnon gentry. Dal’ it all, instead of seeing the race you have to keep watchin’ the chap you’ve bet with.”

Now and again, it is true, a gentleman would lounge idly into the ring, to see what was doing, but he rarely made any attempt at speculation. All that sort of thing they were doing amongst themselves in the stand, or had transacted on previous occasions, such as in the supper-room at the Assembly Rooms on

the night of the Hunt Ball, or round the dining table of St. Helen's. One of the loungers in the ring was Mr. Nuthall ; he had got more money on this race than he at all liked, and though his belief in Denton was unbounded, yet he wished himself well out of it. It was quite evident that the farmers were divided in their allegiance between Mr. Micklam's Kathleen and Mr. Sandeman's The Fiddler. Kathleen Mr. Nuthall understood, but he could not quite make out why The Fiddler was such a much better favourite than Trumpeter, and yet the reason was so very obvious. Kit Cheviott had never been a "bruiser," even in his younger days, and though he went well, he certainly did not come amongst the category of hard-riders. Sandeman, on the contrary, was a young man, and perhaps as good a horseman as there was in the Hunt, and with any luck he and The Fiddler were certain to be well to the fore in a "fast thing." Then again, Captain Denton was simply unknown to them. He might ride, he might not ; they knew nothing about him ; and there certainly is no better rule in a race between amateur jockeys than that of "reckoning up the men first ; it is time enough to think about the best horse, when you have settled who is

the best man. He is generally to be found in conjunction with nearly the best, if not *the best* horse in the race."

Mr. Nuthall had communicated what he had done in the smoking-room to Denton that morning, and the captain had rejoined, "Not at all bad, Nuts, for a young one; it's not so good as what I told you to do; but as you couldn't do that, it was certainly better than taking threes about The Fiddler. Of course there is all the luck of the race to upset calculation. It *is* just possible that I may have gauged one of our adversaries wrongly, but as far as I can reckon it up, there are only three in it, Trumpeter, The Fiddler, and Kathleen. The mare's temper, I reckon, will put her out of it. If they had given her a little less work, she would have had it all her own way, I fancy; as it is, I consider it lies between Sandeman and myself, and which is on the best horse we shall not know till it is over."

One of the most discontented people at the little meeting was Squire Cheviott's groom. Mr. Sliddon, for such was his name, had no belief in a jockey who took such slight apparent interest in his destined mount. Mr. Sliddon had expected that the man to whom the honour of steering Trumpeter had been

confided would have been hard to keep out of the stable, whereas "this Captain Denton" seemed utterly indifferent as to whether the horse was alive or dead.

"What's the use of my pitching him out, bright in the coat, and full of muscle, when this here conceited military gent won't even condescend to look at him? I know what'll happen; now you see if I'm not right, William," he continued, addressing one of his subordinates, "he'll just ride his head off in the first mile, and when he gets down he'll say, 'Nice horse, Sliddon, but slow as a man.'"

Even the Squire had misgivings about his jock. His friends questioned him a good deal about where he had picked up Captain Denton, what were his previous performances, who told him he could ride, what induced him to put him up, and so on; and to all this the Squire could only reply that he had merely Bobby Nuthall's word for it, and that Captain Denton was Trumpeter's jockey was Bobby's suggestion. Now Mr. Nuthall came from those parts. They had all known him from his boyhood. He was immensely popular, and good at a great many things, but in the matter of horses the public did not believe in him, and the consequence of all

these unfavourable rumours was that Mr. Nuthall, whenever he plunged into the ring, found Trumpeter a rather worse favourite than ever. He communicated this to Denton with a most serious face, and though the latter laughed and rejoined “We’ve got as much as we want on a little go like this, or else, Nuts, I’d very soon have him first favourite,” still Mr. Nuthall could not withstand that uneasy feeling which people experience when the shares they hold drop suddenly in the market, or on the turf, when the odds against the horse you have backed expand ominously. You may know that he is perfectly well, you may know there is no reason for this hostility, but you cannot divest yourself of the idea that there is no smoke without fire, and that the book-makers have some mysterious but sufficient cause for their determined opposition.

Pondering over these things, Mr. Nuthall walked moodily into the stand, where he was immediately hailed by one of the Miss Lyddells.

“Do come here, Mr. Nuthall!” exclaimed that young lady. “I have backed Trumpeter for gloves, and even for sovereigns, and I am told now that they’re laying all sorts of prices against him in the Ring. Is that

so? And if it is, what is the meaning of it?"

"That is the case," replied Bobby somewhat ruefully, "but as for the why—ah, stop, here's his jockey. Denton, you know the Miss Lyddells—met them at the Hunt Ball, you know—they've both gone their last shilling upon your mount, and are getting nervous. Do reassure them."

Denton bowed, and as he took a seat beside the young ladies, said :

"The horse is perfectly well, and I think I can promise you this, Miss Lyddell, that you'll have a very good run for your money; win, I may not, but you may depend, bar accidents, that I shall be pretty close to whoever does."

"Come, Ju, that's inspiriting," said the young lady, "and we need not bemoan our lost gloves as yet. My cousin, Molly Lepel, told me, Captain Denton, that you had passed a good deal of time in India."

"Yes; I served there for some years. Have you heard of Miss Lepel's arrival as yet?"

"No; there has hardly been time. She went overland, and we expect to get a letter from her every day. She sent us a scrawl from Cairo, so that we know she has got that far on her way."

"I daresay she will like it—most ladies do. Curious enough, I met a Judge Lepel out there, who I presume is her father."

"Yes, and it is to keep his house that she has gone out. He is a widower, and I believe has not much longer to serve before retiring with his pension."

"And perhaps will come home only to be disgusted with his native country. It's often the case with the great civil servants. They've been used, for years, to the life out there, and when they come home, their life seems cramped, and our climate detestable. But, ha! here come the competitors for the Farmers' Steeplechase, and they're not half a bad-looking lot either, Miss Lyddell. There's one or two, I think, it's quite likely we might have found troublesome in the big race."

"Now, Captain Denton, you're joking," said the young lady.

"Indeed, I am not; the gentlemen's horses are in better condition, but I'm not sure that they have any other pull over the best of the farmers'."

The Farmers' Steeplechase now came off, and resulted in a very fair, if inartistic, finish between three. Then came the hurdle-race, and then excitement waxed high, as the horses paraded for the event of the day.

The first horse out of the enclosure was Mr. Sandeman's grey colt. The Fiddler and the rider, in his gay harlequin jacket, received quite an ovation as he walked his horse leisurely past the stand. There was no doubt that he was the popular hero of the day. He carried most of the farmers' money, and his horse unmistakeably looked as "fit" as hands could make him. Although there were seven runners, it will be hardly necessary to particularise them all. The next of mark to appear was Mr. Micklam's Kathleen. The rider, in his neat, dark blue silk jacket and black cap, wore a somewhat anxious expression, and, truth to say, Mr. Micklam was quite as anxious about the result of the race as our friend Nuts. He also had got a good bit of money on his mare, and could not disguise from himself that the last week's training had embittered her temper. She reached at her bit, and fretted and fidgetted a good deal as she went down. The horse-dealer patted her on the neck, and soothed her as well as he could, but there was no doubt about it that Kathleen, to use a ladylike term, "had got the vapours." The last out of the paddock was Trumpeter, and the old horse's behaviour offered a singular contrast to that of the

mare. He paced past the stand quiet as a sheep, Denton, in the Squire's colours of chocolate and white cap, lounging on him as if he really had not much to do with the business in hand, and then the lot turned round in their preliminary. Nothing goes better past the stand than The Fiddler, who, taking hold of his bit, gallops in downright resolute fashion. A flashy going chesnut, bestrode by a gentleman in pink, also strongly takes the fancy of the spectators. The backers of Kathleen look unutterable things as they see that volatile mare come tearing down the straight, while it is evident that Micklam has to do all he knows to hold her. At last, again, comes lolloping down old Trumpeter, in such sober fashion, that Kit Cheviott dashes out of the stand, and rushing into the middle of the course, exclaims :

“ Captain Denton ! Captain Denton ! ”

Denton, who has already pulled up, turns in his saddle, and enquires :

“ Well, Squire, what is it ? ”

“ The old horse seems to run dull in your hands, but remember this, he always was a bit of a slug, and though he wakes up fast enough when hounds are running, I'm not sure he takes much interest in this game.”

“ Don't be afraid, Squire, I understand him ;

he'll wake up fast enough when I want him to and," he said with a smile; "I'm bound to do that before you see us again."

The competitors quickly clustered together under the starter. A couple of minutes, the flag falls, and they are away. The pink jacket rushes immediately to the front. An enterprising youth this, wearing his first silk jacket; he has wild theories about "cutting down his field," of "strangling them," which are all very well to put into practice when you are on very much the best horse in the race. But he is not destined to have it all his own way upon this occasion. He leads over the first fence, but by this time Kathleen is pulling so unpleasantly that Mr. Micklam determines that it is better to let her take her fling for the present than fight against her. He races up to the pink jacket, and the pair come away such a cracker together that old hands looking on from the stand opine it is much too hot to last. Sandeman, who is riding with patience and judgment, knows very well that the leaders cannot go that pace for three miles, but like the others he is afraid to let them get too far away, and here it is that the science of a practised jockey like Denton comes in. He boldly declines to hurry old Trumpeter in the least, and is lying apparently what in racing

parlance is called "clean out of his ground." His judgment of pace told him that his field must come back to him, and he knew then that he should have the advantage of a comparatively fresh horse against a lot, who, to say the least of it, had taken a good deal out of themselves.

In the stand Trumpeter's friends were extremely disheartened. "It looks, Master Bobby, said the Squire, "as if your friend Denton had merely started to see the race, and not to take part in it," and even Mr. Nuthall, unswerving as was his faith in his captain, was fairly flabbergasted to see how far he was lying behind. But the end of a mile saw a considerable change in the aspect of affairs. Pink jacket had shot his bolt. In his plucky attempt to cut down his field he had cut his own throat; in racing for a mile against a mare far his superior in point of speed he had done his horse to a turn. Micklelam went on with the lead, but was now able to take a pull at Kathleen, and was quite aware that was necessary if he meant to be to the fore at the winning post. Before the next mile was covered Denton, without ever pushing old Trumpeter, was on terms with his horses, and able to take stock of his antagonists. Very much to his surprise, Kathleen

had as yet shown no signs of temper. The Fiddler was going well, and, thanks to Sandeman's steady riding, did not show the effects of the pace quite so much as Denton had hoped for. Old Trumpeter was going as strong beneath him as when he started, and Denton decided at once that it was time to go up and "take a feeler."

Passing Sandeman, he put his horse alongside of Kathleen, and raced with her at the next fence. The mare shook her head, and Micklam, who a little lost his, upon finding this fresh opponent at his girths, allowed himself to be hustled at the jump, in spite of the reckless use he had been already compelled to make of Kathleen. They came over almost abreast, but Denton's practised eye saw that although safe over the mare jumped wildly, and "now or never," he said to himself, "is the time to settle her," so, taking advantage of the big grass field in which they had landed, he came away at score.

Just before starting somebody had unlucky told Micklam that the rider of Trumpeter was a dangerous man, and he fell at once into the trap that Denton had prepared for him. He thought his opponent was now coming right away, and instead of steadying his mare he drove her for the lead.

Before they had reached the next fence Denton took a strong pull at his horse, leaving Micklam to forge ahead, and what he hoped immediately happened. Kathleen swung round and refused; in another instant Denton was over the fence, and making strong play down a furrow of the one ploughed field in the course. He felt he had at last slipped his field, and, bar accidents, had things all his own way; but, like a prudent general, he threw a glance over his shoulder and discovered that he had not quite done with Sandeman and his grey, still he felt confident that his horse must have more left in him than Sandeman's, and that a strong run race home must be all to Trumpeter's advantage, so he sent the old horse along gaily. But Sandeman was equally aware that he must now keep well up with Trumpeter to have the ghost of a chance of winning, and he floundered steadily along some four or five lengths in his rear.

The astonishment of the stand at this remarkable change of affairs may be easily conceived. As for the Squire, he could scarcely believe that his chocolate jacket, which he had looked upon as quite out of it, was now leading by four or five lengths. The formidable Kathleen, by the time her rider succeeded in getting her over the fence she had refused,

had lost a good field, and though she made up her ground at a most amazing rate, the next jump only witnessed a repetition of her bad behaviour. As they turned into the straight half-mile for home, there was nothing in it but Trumpeter and The Fiddler, and it was quite evident that The Fiddler was gradually closing with him. Denton looked uneasily over his shoulder, as they came down to the last fence.

"He has the heels of me," he muttered. "I wonder how much powder he has left. Steady, old man, we must keep a little in hand to finish with."

Trumpeter jumped into the run-in about a couple of lengths ahead, and steadying his horse, Denton looked anxiously round for his rival. Gradually the grey crept up to him. Foot by foot he had gained his quarters, his head was at Trumpeter's girths, and then with an intense sense of relief Denton saw Sandeman sit down and begin riding The Fiddler in earnest. He had not moved upon his horse as yet, and patiently he waited till nearly opposite the stand, when the grey had got to his horse's head. Then he too sat down and shook up Trumpeter. Thanks to the careful nursing he had received at the beginning of the race, the old horse had a flash left in him,

and responding to his rider's call, shot in, a gallant winner by half a length.

Many and hearty were the congratulations that were showered upon Kit Cheviott, on Trumpeter's victory, but with characteristic bluntness the Squire made his way rapidly through his friends to thank his winning jockey. He had done him injustice, and although Denton didn't know it, the Squire was conscious that his remarks during the race had been heard in the stand. He led his horse in, and as he did so, he said :

“I thank you, Captain Denton, for riding my horse, and must express my admiration for the clever way in which you handled him. He owes his victory principally to your judgment. I was fool enough during the race to think you were throwing it away by lying so far out of your ground, which only shows how very much less I knew about it than you did.”

“Well, Squire, no horses that ever were foaled could have lived the pace for three miles which that young gentleman in pink set us to start with. They were bound to come back to me, and they did.”

As for Bobby Nuthall, from taking the most lugubrious view of his prospects, he was suddenly lifted into the seventh heaven.

Instead of losing a lot of money, which a few minutes ago he had deemed his inevitable destiny, he had won what was for him a big stake, and was now loudly glorifying his captain's horsemanship. In short, Nuts was simply the life and soul of the Grand Stand for the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

MOLLY ARRIVES AT ARRAH.

COMING along the causeway road leading into Arrah, in the dim twilight, might be seen a palkee. The bearers are advancing at their usual shuffle, and giving vent to that ordinary monotonous and exasperating chant, with which we may presume they lighten their labours. The relief, bearing torches, is jogging along ahead, and inside that palanquin is stretched Molly Lepel. By no means tired of India, which is all new to her fresh young mind, and which certainly is a wondrous country to see, whatever you may deem it to reside in, but Molly is very weary of palkee dâk. She has had many breaks in her journey up country, halting here and there, for a short time, with old friends of her father's. But when it comes to the travelling, Molly arrives at the conclusion they manage these things better at home. Bear in mind, I am speaking of the India of a good five-and-twenty years ago, when railways were in their infancy, and

to travel by dâk of some kind was imperative. How tired she gets of night after night in that hot litter ; of those dreary days, passed in strangers' bungalows, with no one to say a word to. It spoke well for our prestige, that before the mutinies an English lady might travel hundreds of miles, solely in charge of native bearers, and fear nothing but the unpleasantness of travel.

Suddenly there flashes upon the road a couple of bright lights, they gleam bigger and bigger, and all at once a buggy reins up in the middle of the road, and a commanding voice orders the palanquin to stop. As the syce runs to the horse's head, the man rapidly descends, and as Miss Lepel draws back the lattice of her palanquin to enquire into the cause of this stoppage, she is confronted by the Judge, who exclaims—

“Molly Lepel, I fancy. Get out, my dear. I haven't seen you since you were a child, and probably shouldn't know you now, even if I could see you, which I can't in this light. But take out your wraps, child, and then jump into the buggy along with me. We shall be home in twenty minutes, while it will take these fellows over an hour to get there.”

Thus adjured, Molly slipped out of the palanquin and with her father's assistance soon

climbed into the buggy. Turning it round, the Judge dropped the whip lightly on the best roadster Fawcett had in his stables.

It was good going, and it was not long before they pulled up in front of that gentleman's bungalow. Throwing the reins to the syce, the Judge helped his daughter out, and as he led her into the light, clasped her two hands, and after gazing at her long and earnestly, exclaimed, "How handsome you've grown, child! And, my God! how like your poor mother. Ah! well, Molly," he continued as he kissed her, "that is no small compliment. You needn't think it's simply sentiment on my part. There are men out here who will tell you that your mother was one of the handsomest and most graceful creatures they ever saw."

Molly, in her turn, looked keenly and anxiously at her father. It was only natural that she should peer into the face of this father whom she could only just remember, and her heart swelled, as she marked the keen, handsome, resolute features of a man, scarce past the prime of life.

"Yes, papa," she said softly, "we have much lost time to make up. It couldn't be helped, but we have got to learn to know one another."

"Yes," he replied, as he passed his hand caressingly over her hair, "but I trust, Molly, we shall not be long before we do that. And now, child, run away and make such arrangements as you can for dinner; we know you've no baggage, and therefore can make allowances. There will be nobody but our host, and you will find the cleverest ayah I have been able to pick up waiting for you in your room."

Molly had no sooner left the room than Fawcett made his appearance. "I tell you what, Judge," he said, "you and Miss Lepel must have lots to say to one another, and what is more I want to have a talk with Cole. There are very bad rumours afloat to-day. Far from being stamped out, this confounded mutiny is assuming the most serious proportions. Far from having retaken Delhi, it seems they are not even likely to do so for some time. I hear that all Oude is in a blaze, and that the Sepoys are rising and murdering their officers in all directions. I called Cole a croaker the other night, but I'm afraid he took a truer estimate of the whole business than we did. Call for everything you want, and my people will attend to you."

"Thank you, I shall be anxious to hear what Cole thinks of things; he is a shrewd,

long-headed fellow, and not likely to over-estimate danger."

"No, you can test a man's nerve pretty well when you've seen him amongst the big game. And I've seen him steady enough even when things looked awkward, and now for the present, good-bye."

The hearts of those with wives and daughters might well wax faint, as the reports of the lurid blaze of insurrection that had broken forth over the greater part of Bengal came to their ears. Arrah promised to escape, insomuch as there was no garrison to mutiny ; and after they had once risen the mutineers usually made their way rapidly to Delhi. But still the veriest trifle might cause them to diverge from that intention, and then the sacking of Arrah, and the murder of every European within it, would probably follow as a matter of course. But here Molly entered, and the Judge made a vigorous effort to throw off the fears that oppressed him.

"I suppose you had a very tedious journey down?"

"Not so bad altogether, papa." Your old friends were very kind, and I rested for a few days at three or four stations. I don't mean to say palkee dâk is a pleasant way of travelling, but I shouldn't so much have minded if

people had not rather frightened me about the state of the country. It is enough to make a girl rather nervous, the finding herself entirely in the hands of her bearers ; and then, of course, I was told of some of the horrors that had taken place up country, and I don't mind confessing that I had my heart in my mouth a good deal on the road, and am very, very glad to find myself safe with you at last."

Then Judge Lepel and his daughter fell into converse about family matters. There were relatives and friends to inquire about, for it was near upon ten years since the Judge had set foot in England. That is the sad thing about these long absences. Your friends and relations have so long lost sight of you, that dear as you have been to them once, your advent fails to rouse much enthusiasm now. You seem to have lost all clue to their lives, and the splendours of the East interest them not at all. I am speaking, remember, of five-and-twenty years ago. Now, a young man is hardly counted travelled unless he has rolled over "the monarch of the jungle."

However, by dint of hard cross questioning, the Judge managed to trace the history of those he had cared about, when suddenly a man's step was heard in the verandah, and

Fawcett entered. "This is our host, Molly," exclaimed the Judge, rising, "and an old friend of twenty years' standing and more."

"Only too pleased to welcome your father's daughter, Miss Lepel," said Fawcett as he shook hands. "You must overlook the shortcomings of a bachelor's *ménage*, please, and understand that I mean making you comfortable as far as my lights go."

"Do you bring any news?" enquired the Judge.

"Well, yes," replied Fawcett, indifferently — "but I'll open my budget later on."

"Which means," said Molly, laughing, "when I have retired; and that, Mr. Fawcett, I will do at once. I've had a long and wearisome day, and shall be very glad to get to sleep."

"Well?" said the Judge, as his daughter left the room.

"Cole thinks things can't look worse; the Sepoys at Dinapore are on the very verge of mutiny, and though everybody is urging him to disarm them, the general cannot make up his mind to do it. As Cole says, vacillation in times like these is destruction, prompt determination is everything; the end of it will be, those beggars will break away with their arms in their hands. I tell you what, Judge,

I went over Cole's citadel this evening. Upon my word, he's a wonderful fellow; he has got it victualled, he has got a well almost in the house, and he has got lots of ammunition. I really think that about fifty resolute men could hold out there for a couple of days. However, it will be a bad look-out if it comes to that."

The Judge looked very grave, as he replied: "We must hope for the best, but it was a cruel stroke of bad fortune that led me to bring Molly out here at such a time."

"No doubt," replied the other; "but nobody could have foreseen—or, at all events, I don't know anybody that did—this frightful outbreak, some few months ago, which was when you decided upon Miss Lepel's joining you."

"No," rejoined the Judge, "I cannot blame myself for that. I suppose we ought to have read the signs of the times, but we didn't; nor, as you say, did others in better positions to judge of the state of things. And, now I'm off to bed. There's one maxim we had better stick to, and that is to sleep while we may. If anything like what Cole pictures should happen, we are not likely to have much opportunity till we are either rescued, or 'sleep the sleep that knows no waking.'"

The next morning realised Cole's prediction,

and a company consisting of fifty Sikhs rode in to Arrah, but, rather to the astonishment of the white men, there was no English officer with them. The Subadoor (or native officer) commanding them reported himself to Fawcett, and brought a note from the commissioner of Patna, to say that these soldiers would be under his direction. But before many hours were over, Cole burst into the bungalow, and exclaimed, "It's come at last! Dinapore's gone! I daresay, Fawcett, you'll get your official communication a little later on—mine goes no further than to say that six thousand Sepoys, with their arms in their hands, have marched out of Dinapore, and are quite as likely to come our way as anywhere else. All this the consequence, mind you, of a man with neither mind nor resolution being in command there."

"You can thoroughly rely on your information, of course?"

"Thoroughly," replied Cole. "There is plenty of time, for some hours must elapse before they get here. But I earnestly counsel your putting what things you want together, and in the course of the day moving into my house. I need scarcely say bring all the guns and ammunition you have with you."

"May I ask, Cole," inquired Judge Lepel,

who had entered the room during the above conversation, “what makes you feel so positive that the mutineers will march upon Arrah?”

“Fawcett there, if he will take the trouble to think, can answer that question better than I can. Kunwar Singh, recollect, is the great landed proprietor of this neighbourhood.”

“By Jove! yes. I never thought of that!” cried Fawcett. “He is in debt over head and ears, and the government, only this year, threatened to foreclose on his estates if he didn’t clear off a considerable portion of his liabilities. Naturally that fellow wants a row. Why, he is in the position of an embarrassed Irish gentleman, and would as naturally raise the barony, when he found the sheriffs’ officers intended paying him a visit.”

“That’s just it,” rejoined Cole. “I get a lot of all this sort of information from my native superintendents on the works. Kunwar Singh, you may depend upon it, has been for some time in communication with the disaffected Sepoys at Dinapore. Then he has got his own ragamuffins besides, to put himself at the head of. The first desire of the revolted Sepoy is license, plunder, and the

cutting the throats of the Feringhees, and Kunwar Singh has doubtless pointed out that Arrah fulfils all those requirements."

"You are quite right, Cole," rejoined Fawcett, "Kunwar Singh is quite certain to have pointed all this out to the Sepoys. The overthrow of our rule will of course suit him exactly, he wipes off his debt at once."

"Yes," said the Judge, "you've quite made out the case. These are excellent reasons why the mutineers should come to Arrah, which lies quite at their mercy, and there do not appear to be any reasons why they should not. We had better pack up our things and take refuge in your house, in the course of the day; and now there is one thing. Do you think we can trust the Sikhs?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Cole. "As far as I can learn, they have invariably stood loyal to us as bodies, that is, I mean, when the regiments have been entirely composed of their own race."

"There's one thing further," said Fawcett, dropping his voice. "We've very little choice about trusting them now. Capital as Cole's defences are, I doubt if a dozen of us could hold them."

"Then I shall consider that point settled.

We all withdraw to my house this afternoon. As for the Sikhs, I'll make every preparation for putting them up. I suppose they may as well bivouac outside for to-night. If you will give them their orders, Fawcett, we can withdraw them into the house as soon as it becomes necessary."

The morning was passed in selecting the necessary essentials for what might prove to be a somewhat protracted visit. Besides their clothes, and every description of fire arm on the premises, Fawcett also sent down all the tinned meats and other comestibles he could lay his hands upon in the bungalow, and that afternoon saw the whole party established in Cole's house, awaiting what fate might have in store for them.

CHAPTER VIII.

“EASTWARD HO!”

CLOSE upon three months have elapsed since Denton drove Kit Cheviott's old horse home triumphantly for the West Kent Hunt Steeplechase, and there has arrived in England the rumour of a mutiny of the Sepoys in Bengal. Not much is as yet thought of this, the Sepoys had mutinied before, notably in the case of Vellore, many years previously, to say nothing of its having been several times the case that it had been found requisite to disarm a regiment or two on account of insubordination. There was no Suez Canal, bear in mind, in those days, nor yet any telegraphic communication in India, and therefore information between the two countries travelled but slowly. As yet to the public this rumour was vague, and attracted but little attention; and if the authorities were more disquieted, they, at all events, kept their anxieties to themselves. It might well be so, when we consider that men experienced in the country and on the spot saw in the falling barometer but a passing squall, and never dreamt of the cyclone so

close at hand. Even those whose clearer vision gave them a foresight into the coming troubles, with their deluge of blood, crime, anarchy and ruthless oppression, seemed, except in the case of the very strong-minded, to have had their hands partially tied by the utter incredulity of their colleagues. The officers of the Company's service could not be induced to believe in the infidelity of their own particular corps. "The Fifth have mutinied at Meerut, but we can pin our lives on the faith of our fellows," was the predominant feeling through the Bengal Army. The colonels and generals of the old Company's service, not to mention those holding similar rank in the Queen's Army, who had won their laurels at the head of these very Sepoys, could not be induced to believe that they would as a whole prove false to their salt. Here and there, no doubt, a regiment might prove disloyal to their colours, but as a body no ; they were certain that the Bengal Army would never prove faithless to its traditions and its officers.

There was one thing, that few of these men took in at the time, and those only men of great intelligence and who understood the North-West Provinces and the composition of that Bengal Sepoy army, namely,

the effects of the annexation of Oude. This was not only the upsetting of an ancient kingdom, but it also assumed, and with considerable show of reason, to the nobility and large landholders of Oude, the probable confiscation of their estates. If Thomas Atkins heard that the Squire of his parish, that all his village relations, and friends were boiling with indignation and seething with resentment against Her Majesty, it would try his loyalty, staunch as he has always proved to his officers in troubles of this nature, but then here the difference of race has to be taken into calculation, and the fierce religious difference that inwardly, however expediency may suggest its glossing over, ever rages between the Moslem and the Giaour.

Denton had followed such meagre news as he had been able to collect about this mutiny with the greatest possible interest. He had no more idea of the gigantic proportions it was fated to assume, or that it was to be a death grapple between ourselves, the mutineers, and the Begum of Oude for the possession of India, than it may be presumed the military authorities at home as yet dreamt of; but he was a shrewd, cool-headed, observant man, had passed a good many years of his life in that country; and as each mail continued

to bring tidings of the gradual spread of the conflagration, and, most striking point of all to his mind, the fact that Delhi was as yet not re-taken, Denton began to think that the war in India might after all assume very imposing proportions.

"Well," he muttered, grimly, "I suppose I never shall see the real thing. If I had stuck to the old regiment I must have been in it, and, now I've got the rank of captain, should probably have had the chance of a good berth in the staff, or something of that sort. It is too absurd," he continued, laughing. "Here I hunt the grisly phantom of war, with its glory, honours, and all the rest of it, but with the result of becoming a member of the Peace Society. I suppose I never am destined to raise my hand against my fellow."

But Denton was destined very shortly to be undeceived on that point, and fated to have full indulgence of his lust for fighting before he died. Quietly as the thing was kept, the news from India grew worse by every mail, and it was speedily evident to the Home Government that if we meant to keep India, it was an absolute necessity that we should send every soldier we could lay our hands upon, and that with the least possible delay. It was singular, but only a few

months before, the Crimean War being safely got through with, the reduction of the army became of course of paramount importance, and good and tried soldiers were dismissed from the ranks, either with their own consent or upon small pretext.

On the strength of his winnings over Trumpeter, Mr. Nuthall had indulged in various jaunts to town during that spring. Mr. Nuthall was very fond of what he termed "a little kick-up" in the metropolis, and it was upon his return from one of these excursions that he sought Denton's quarters.

"What, Nuts, back again? Strikes me, young man, you are fooling away a good deal of money over these London jaunts."

"Well," laughed Bobby, "I can't as far as I'm concerned quite say I earned it, but never mind, I got it, and it is precious dull work down here just now, but I've got a bit of news for you. I was dining with young Lindsay at the 'Rag' last night, and when we got into the smoking-room it was all in a ferment. They say there is some terrible news come home from India, and that half-a-dozen regiments have got orders to hold themselves in readiness for immediate embarkation. There was one fellow there, a Major Dundas——"

"I know him, go on," interrupted Denton.

"Who said he had been down to the Horse Guards that afternoon, and 'they're pretty full of work there, I can tell you,' he continued. 'We're going, I know, and so are the —th Highlanders, and the —th Fusiliers; but if half the rumours about this afternoon are true, it's a case of the Crimea over again, my boys. Every available soldier we have will be doubling the Cape before many weeks are past. The Overland route won't be much good when you come to pour troops along it.'"

"Dundas said that, Nuts, did he? He's a rattling fine soldier, and has distinguished himself more than once. He has a keen instinct for the brawl of battle, and the knack of being in the thick of the fighting wherever it may be. I shall run up to town at once, if I can catch the chief and get his leave. I'll be off by the night mail for three days. You needn't mention that it was the news you have brought down that has taken me there."

Mr. Nuthall would have liked to ask further questions, but a look had come over Denton's face which he thoroughly understood, and he quitted the room, without further remark.

This anxiety to see active service had become almost morbid with Denton, and yet it

is not difficult of comprehension. For an officer of his standing to be still undecorated now-a-days was marked. Not three years previously, and exactly the converse of this state of things existed. The regimental officers who wore medals were comparatively few, and such distinctions had been chiefly attained in India. Denton readily obtained the leave he asked for, and lost no time in making his way to London.

In the course of the next day or two, he was perfectly reassured, and found that Dundas had taken a very accurate estimate of the case. Not only were the half-dozen regiments first rumoured now authoritatively pronounced to be under orders in all the papers, but it was further stated that the government were taking up transport in all directions. Denton speedily ascertained that if more regiments had not as yet received their orders, it was simply because they had not so far sufficient ships in which to embark them, but that there was a long list of horse, foot and artillery, all down for the East, as soon as transports could be provided for them, and that his own corps figured very close to the top of it. Denton returned to Winchester, perfectly satisfied at the prospect before him. Just before leaving town,

he ran across Dun, who was an old friend, on the steps of the "Rag."

"Things are as bad out there as they can be," he remarked, "they've only just woke up to it here, but we've been trying to put out a conflagration with a garden syringe. I heard from a man in Bengal last mail, whom I can thoroughly rely on, and that is what he describes it. He goes on to say that the fire is spreading, and that it will be all they can do to hold on till they get the necessary reinforcements. No, Denton, you may depend upon it, it is no child's play we're going out about, and don't you be the least afraid that you'll be out of it this time. There's no chance whatever of the insurrection being put down before you get there. There's a long and severe campaign before us, and many a weary siege, and many a bitter battle to be fought, before we see England again. Some of us will never run up the steps here any more. However, we will trust that you and I may be amongst the fortunate ones, and finish a bottle of champagne together as colonels. Good-bye, we shall meet again up in the North-West Provinces somewhere, there is no doubt."

'Eastward ho! Once more the legions of England are steaming to the East with all the speed they can muster, but it is not through

the Gulf of Gibraltar and up the Mediterranean this time ; it is a far longer journey across the Atlantic, around "the Gallas," off which stormy point the inevitable heavy gale has to be encountered. Across the Indian Ocean and up the muddy Hooghly, to the City of Palaces, steadfastly transport after transport ploughs its way across the ocean, at the best pace it can travel ; there is money being lavished for speed, and penalties for the want of it ; for every day, under a certain fixed number, the owners of those ships can claim extra payment ; for every day over they are liable to a fine by their contract. Like their progenitors the Norsemen, England's soldiers are dependent in great measure on their ships. Galle the destination of all of them in the first instance, there to receive their orders from Calcutta. There was much mystery concerning the extent of the mutiny when the —th left England, and there were many who thought that the whole affair would be stamped out long before they reached India, but Denton, judging from what Dundas had told him, and also from his previous knowledge of India, had little doubt but what it was a very serious outbreak indeed. Still, from the time they had left Portsmouth, they had seen or heard meta-

phorically nothing of what was going on in the world. They had touched nowhere, except for coal at Teneriffe, and in sleepy, humdrum Vera Cruz they were not likely to hear any news. But when they dropped anchor just outside the harbour of Galle, the dull monotony of their voyage was speedily dissipated. There they got bundles of the English newspapers which had come out overland, and which contained vivid accounts of how station after station had blazed forth in rebellion, winding up with an account of all the horrors and hideous massacres of Cawnpore.

Have you ever seen man transformed by passion into the semblance of a wild beast ? when his eyes glitter with vengeance, and when the object of his resentment might as well hope for mercy from a wounded tiger as from him. Look at that group of soldiers on the deck of the “Caledonia” ? Watch their faces, as one of their number reads out the tale of the dishonour and butchery of the ladies and children, who were gathered together within Wheeler’s entrenchments. Watch their faces as he reads out to them the story of the shameful treachery of the Rajah of Bithoor. There is a wolfish look comes into their eyes, and the savage maledictions that are growled out from under their

moustaches give promise of little quarter for the mutineers, when their hour of expiation shall come. I doubt on the quarter-deck whether things are much better. Amongst the officers there is a feverish anxiety to use those swords and revolvers hanging in the cabins or strewn about the deck. When the day of reckoning shall come, the men will be hard to hold, I trow, and the officers have small stomach for restraining them.

Suddenly an anxious thought shot across Denton's mind. It was evident, by the papers, that pretty well all Bengal was gone, and that the authorities were very uneasy about Bombay; in fact those in high places in India might well be uneasy. They knew not whom they could trust. There was no doubt that some few of the Bombay regiments were tainted with treason, and Denton knew that some small portion of the outcoming troops would be probably sent to that Presidency to check any wavering on the part of the Sepoys there. However, a few hours did away with any fear of that sort; a catamaran came out to them with orders to come into the harbour as soon as "The Golden Fleece" had cleared out, there to coal, and then to proceed on to Calcutta with all possible despatch. At noon next day "The Golden Fleece" steamed

by them, on her way to the Sand Heads, and a ringing cheer burst from the throats of the 47th and the two companies of the Black Watch which were aboard of her, and then the "Caledonia" crept quietly to her moorings in Galle harbour. The "Caledonia" contained but three companies of the —th, under the command of one of the majors. Regiments were sent out in detachments at that time very extensively. Government had to take up ships of all descriptions, big and little; anything that could make good time round the Cape, they were only too glad to lay their hands on. But time was everything, and to put every available soldier there was in India as quickly as might be was—I won't say our only, but certainly our best, chance of retaining the country. Denton went ashore at Galle for a few hours, and heard quite enough there to convince him, that, far from the rebellion being in the least stamped out, the campaign for its repression had barely begun. The process of coaling was soon concluded, and the next day saw the "Caledonia" battling with the stormy waters of the Bay of Bengal. Scant time was vouchsafed the officers of Her Majesty's —th to study the glories of the City of Palaces, their orders being to proceed to Dinapore without delay.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIEGE BEGINS.

THE twenty-sixth of July saw the handful of Europeans at Arrah gathered together in the house that Mr. Cole had so assiduously fortified. A queer dinner to have assisted at was the one their host gave them that evening. I do not mean that there was any peculiarity about it as far as the dinner went, beyond that it was somewhat in the rough, as might be expected under the circumstances, but they were people wondering as to what might happen before they gathered round that board again. They were men with ears on the strain for the first discharge of firearms, for the fierce yell of an unlicensed soldiery drunk with ideas of rapine and bloodshed. Mrs. Cole and Molly were women only too terribly aware of the awful danger of their position. Poor Mrs. Cole did her very best, and tried bravely to conceal the terror which filled her heart, but she was of a timorous disposition, and could not hide that her nerves were shaken past control. Molly was made of

different stuff; her eye flashed defiance, and she blenched not an iota at the thought of the siege they were probably about to sustain. But when she and Mrs. Cole rose to leave the gentlemen to their tobacco she went round to her father and whispered to him:

“Come into the verandah for a moment, papa. I want to speak to you.”

“Excuse me one moment, Cole,” said the Judge, as he rose and followed his daughter. “What is it, my dear?” he continued, as they stood looking out into the bright moonlight.

“I want you to make me one promise, papa. It is the first request I have ever made you, and you may hesitate to grant it, but you will make me very miserable if you refuse. I can promise on my side to be plucky to the last, and helpful as a woman may be in the work that lies before us. Put my mind at rest on this one point, and you shall see your daughter is no craven.”

“What is it you want, child? Speak out.”

“Father, I have heard on my way up the country of the shameful treatment English ladies have been subjected to who have fallen into the hands of these slaves who have risen against us,” and no words can describe the contemptuous tones with which Molly uttered these words. “Promise me this, that when in

your judgment all is lost, and their victory inevitable, you leave no chance of my falling alive into their hands. You will know what I mean, father ; if it comes to the worst, empty one barrel of your revolver into my breast before you dree your own doom."

"I understand, Molly, and I promise," rejoined the Judge. "You may trust unflinchingly to me for that. I would sooner kill you with my own hand than leave you to the mercy of a pack of Sepoys false to their salt. And now, good-night, my dear. We must all get what sleep we can to-night, perhaps it may be the last quiet one we shall pass for some days."

When Judge Lepel returned to the dining-room, he found that the dangers of their position had made no very great difference in the spirits of the guests. If there had been some tension during dinner, under the influence of tobacco and a modest amount of brandy pawnee, the men had recovered their accustomed equilibrium. There was of course much discussion about their present situation. Cole told them frankly that the arrival of the mutineers at Arrah was a mere matter of time.

"Some of my people," he said, "whom I sent scouting to-day, have brought in two reports, which I consider make that a foregone con-

clusion. The six thousand Sepoys who have broken loose from Dinapore have crossed the Sôn, and old Kunwar Singh has raised all his tenantry, and thrown in his lot with them."

"Dear old gentleman," laughed Fawcett, "He thinks to save the foreclosure of those mortgages yet, but I think he is more likely to make an end of his venerable life, through the trouble that will eventually accrue to him."

"Ah! he must be a very old man, by the way," remarked the Judge, "too old, I should have thought, to mix himself up in an imbroglio like this."

"Age doesn't tame the tiger, Judge," rejoined Fawcett sententiously, "nor does age dissipate the Asiatic's passion for intrigue —depend upon it, there's not a rajah or ruler of a native state in all India who is not balancing in his own mind whether he had best be for us or against us in this crisis."

"Yes," chimed in Cole, "and it will be matter of the greatest importance to us to stem the tide as soon as possible. Even native states, who bear us goodwill, can be but trimmers at such a moment as this. It's no use talking about it, for a man's own interest usually sways his actions in this world. And

all these petty rajahs and maharajahs would fain be on the winning side."

"Troops! Troops! English soldiers are what we want," exclaimed Judge Lepel, "and the recovery of the revolted districts is simply a question of how quickly we may expect reinforcements from home."

Even as he spoke there were traitorous hearts in Calcutta that already viewed with dismay the river of steel that was flowing through the City of Palaces. Agents of the leaders of the insurrection watched with the gravest misgivings the British bayonets that landed every two or three days, and immediately hurried up country. They began to recognise that they were measuring their strength against a gigantic power—a power apparently that could pour endless English soldiers into the country, and the prestige of the Feringhees in the battle-field was still high as ever. For near on a century no race on the whole Peninsula could boast of more than a temporary triumph over the white man, and against what odds he had fought and conquered was firmly graven on their memories.

A cheroot or two finished, and the party generally withdrew to their respective sleeping places, and finally Judge Lepel and Fawcett found themselves the only men left in what

was destined to be the sole living room of the little party for some time. The Judge was a man who habitually kept rather late hours for India. He was a man who could do with but very little sleep, and indeed seemed incapable of getting through more than four or five hours of it at a time.

"Have another manilla, Fawcett," he exclaimed, "it's no use going to bed as far as I'm concerned, just yet. I should only toss about, and make myself hot and uncomfortable."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," replied the Collector, "but I feel as if I should sleep without rocking when I do get to bed. We shall be in a tight place before many hours are over our heads; but that old gentleman at Dinapore, whose want of decision has got us into this scrape, is surely bound to come to our rescue if we can hold out for two or three days."

"We must trust so," replied the Judge. "If they've not already relieved him from his command, they most decidedly ought to have done, at a crisis like this; incompetent men ought to be superseded at once."

"Yes; leaders must have both energy and daring in an affair of this kind. I recollect when I was off the coast of Madagascar——"

"Why, good heavens! where was that? How did you get there? What were you doing there?"

"Well, you see, Judge," continued the narrator. (There was a slight twinkle in his eye, which, to those who knew him well, was indicative of a lapse into his besetting weakness.) "I was on furlough, and I thought a sea-voyage would pick me up better than a turn at the Hills. Well, I had a chum who commanded one of those brigs employed in the suppression of the slave trade. I can't say it was a lively amusement, and, as far as sport goes, we seemed dead out of luck; it wasn't that we couldn't find plenty of malefactors, but the thing was, we never could catch them. As far as chasing dhows went, we had quite a gay time, but when it came to catching them, it was quite another thing. Our old tub of a boat wasn't in it; they all sailed about three feet to our two. As for my pal, he got as mad as a hatter, and vowed the authorities ought to be ashamed of themselves for asking anybody to command such a precious old washing-tub as had fallen to his lot. She was a comfortable craft, you know, but nobody could call her fast."

"Well," said the Judge, "still I don't see

that there was much danger in all this ; if you couldn't catch these slavers, you certainly had no chance of fighting them."

"Just wait a bit," rejoined Fawcett, "and you will see. One morning we sighted a very large dhow, and at once proceeded to give chase. To my chum's astonishment and gratification, we had at last come across a craft that went slower than ourselves. We gained slowly but surely, and after a chase of some hours, were near enough to send a shot across his forefoot. He complied with the hint, and lay to. We ran down pretty close to him : and then a boat was lowered with orders to go aboard, and, if he was fitted as a slaver, to take possession. Well, I wanted to have a look at a regular slaver, so I got permission to go on board, too. We were very soon alongside, and a more villainous skipper than the Arab in command I think I never set eyes on. The crew, too, were such a set of unmitigated-looking scoundrels, that if they had come before you, Judge, you would have hung 'em at sight."

"Still, I don't see where the danger comes in."

"Wait a bit, Judge, wait a bit," replied the Collector, somewhat drowsily. "They

received us sullenly, and I could see had more than half a mind to attempt putting us overboard, but they were under the guns of the brig, and were afraid to try that experiment. No doubt about what they were; one peep down the hatchway, and if your eyes hadn't told you the truth, your nose would. She was full of slaves, packed something like figs in a drum. He was a smartish young lieutenant who was in charge of the boat, and saw at once that the crew of the slaver considerably outnumbered his own men; he was determined not to throw away a chance, and immediately ordered the villainous-looking captain and his truculent-looking crew below. Well, by this time, it was getting dark, and so the officer in charge elected to remain on board. We slept that night, I need hardly tell you, with one eye open."

And here the narrator came to a pause in his story.

"Well?" exclaimed the Judge, impatiently, for he had got really interested in the story."

"With the first dawn of day we were in our saddles," resumed Fawcett.

"In our saddles?" rejoined the Judge in blank astonishment. "Why you were chasing dhows off the coast of Madagascar!"

"What nonsense you're talking, Judge! Why I was telling you a story about cattle driving in South America. You must have been asleep."

"One of us must," replied the Judge, laughing, "but I own I should have liked to hear the end of the capture of that dhow off the coast of Madagascar."

"Ah! I'll tell you that story another time," rejoined Fawcett, as he threw away his extinct cigar. "It really is time now to think of going to sleep."

Early the next morning, the sound of tom-toms, the yells of the excited population, and the firing of innumerable muskets, gave notice of the entrance of the mutineers into Arrah.

Scouts were sent out, the Sikhs quietly withdrawn within the house, the doors barricaded, and every preparation that suggested itself made for facing the coming trouble. The scouts speedily returned with the intelligence that the customary programme of the mutineers was being carried out to the letter; the stores, the treasury, and all the principal bungalows had been looted and fired, the gates of the jail had been cast open, loosing upon the country some five hundred malefactors, but as yet the mutineers, drunk with plundering and arson, had thought but

little of what had become of the Europeans connected with the station.

During that day it did not occur to them, but on the following morning, it flashed across the minds of the leaders that there was some small work of throat-cutting, and the annihilation of the hated Feringhee, to be got through before quitting the place. Where were these Englishmen? Where did they hide themselves? And the mutineers gave the inhabitants of Arrah to understand that skinning alive or its equivalent would be the lot of any native who dared to protect an Englishman from his just doom.

There was so little disguise about where the Englishmen were that the Sepoys had not to enquire twice on the subject.

Men who have burst the shackles of discipline, who are drunk with plunder, and thirsting for murder, are usually furious in their onset, but if they come on with all the tumult of war in their bearing, it is wonderful how they collapse at the first check.

Ostentatious was the swagger with which some five or six hundred of those Sepoys marched down, to use a homely phrase, to settle accounts with the Europeans of Arrah; boldly and loftily they summoned the little house to surrender, but the grim reply of a

volley, that stretched near a score of them on the ground, produced a remarkable change in their intentions. These Europeans might not be numerous, but it dawned upon the Sepoy mind that these Feringhees meant fighting in bitter earnest, and there were plenty of them knew how the Englishman could fight when put to it. They withdrew rapidly to confer with their comrades, about this phenomenal fact, that a dozen Englishmen were voluntarily courting death, while refusing to surrender to a force of some six thousand men. The obstinacy of these English was inscrutable, they were pigs, but they were pigs undoubtedly who showed very awkward tusks to those bent on their destruction.

So far the mutineers had not mastered the fact, that this handful of Englishmen had fifty staunch reliable Sikhs behind them ; and when the wassail ran high amongst their leaders that evening in Fawcett's bungalow, where in defiance of the doctrines of Mahomet, they quaffed the Collector's choicest wines, they laughed in their beards, and vowed that to-morrow should see that house levelled to the ground and not a Feringhee left alive in Arrah. Threatened men live long, and the fall of many a besieged place has much upset the calculations of the experts.

CHAPTER X.

HIS BAPTISM OF FIRE.

HER Majesty's —th reached Dinapore the day after the mutineers had been permitted to march out of it, their muskets on their shoulders, and their pouches full of ball cartridge. The station was in great commotion, and Denton and his companions heard bitter comment on the supineness and vacillation of the general in command, who, it was argued, ought to have disarmed them a week ago. Now the great interest centred upon where the mutineers would make for. Delhi was the goal for which the Sepoys made as a rule, having generally burnt the station at which they had risen, if there had not been European troops enough, as was the case at Dina-pore, to render such a proceeding hazardous. They had not to wait long for news of them ; it was speedily known that want of boats had prevented their crossing the Ganges, and they had consequently marched upon Arrah.

Some effort, it was determined, must be made to save the handful of English resident at that place, and a force was quickly orga-

nised, consisting of some three hundred and fifty European soldiers, some Sikhs, and a few volunteers, in all about four hundred men, and of these, one hundred were men of the —th, under Denton, the whole being under the command of a Captain Dunbar. A diminutive column indeed, with which to disperse a force that numbered more thousands than they did hundreds, but Englishmen since the days of Plassy have recked little of numbers, when it came to dealing with the Asiatic.

As, to save Arrah, time was a matter of great consideration, it was resolved to utilise a steamer which was lying in the Sôn, and to transport the column a considerable way up the river, and then to disembark them within an easy day's march of the station they came to save. Before they started it was known that the mutineers had reached Arrah and looted the cantonment, but that the English had taken refuge in one of the houses, and had so far defended themselves successfully. The trip by the river was accomplished without any incident, and then the disembarkation of the little column was effected, without difficulty, at the point nearest to the station. The order was at once issued for the men to dine, when suddenly firing was heard from the advance guard, and it was quickly ascer-

tained they had come across a small body of Sepoys on the banks of a wide and deep rivulet, about two miles distant. The Sepoys, however, speedily retreated and the whole force pushed on to the rivulet in question. There, the officers and men were cheered by the news brought by the villagers, that the garrison were still holding out, whilst the booming of the guns in the direction of Arrah showed that their countrymen were hard pressed, and that the Sepoys had somehow obtained possession of field pieces. They had still fifteen miles before them, through a well-wooded country, and along a road heavy from the recent rains. There was some slight discussion as to whether they should bivouac where they were for the night ; but it was ultimately determined to push on, Captain Dunbar rightly deciding that the relief of Arrah was a thing that admitted of no delay. Boats were procured, the rivulet crossed, and they proceeded to advance, led by a native guide.

They marched about eleven miles, without seeing any traces of the enemy, but at the end of that time a small body of cavalry appeared in their front ; who, however, galloped off before a shot was fired at them. It was now about eleven o'clock, and the moon went down, still, hopeful and confident,

the column pressed on till within a mile of Arrah. There Captain Dunbar called in his skirmishers, and moved on in column of march.

"Strikes me this isn't whist, Nuts," remarked Denton to his subaltern, "in a wooded country like this, with such slippery devils as we are called on to deal with. I think I should have felt the way right in to the station."

They were marching along the length of a dense mango grove, on the right of the road, when suddenly the grove was lit by a blaze of fire, and a tremendous volley was poured into the long flank of the column, while almost simultaneously, a smaller body from a group of trees in front swept away the leading files. Captain Dunbar and several officers fell at the first discharge never to rise again, and now, from both flanks as well as from the front, was poured in a deadly fire from an invisible enemy. The white uniforms of the Europeans made them mere targets for the foe. Surprised, their leaders slain, their formation all lost, no wonder the men threw themselves into small groups and began to fire wildly in all directions. Denton grasped the extent of the disaster at once, but he was some distance from the head of the column, and it was some few minutes before he became aware that Dunbar's death had placed

him in command of the force. He was prompt and decided enough the minute he found that the responsibility had devolved upon himself. Casting a quick glance over the ground for a position which would afford some slight cover under which to rally his men, his eye fell upon a disused tank, and gathering together as many of his own regiment as he could, and especially his bugler, he made his way rapidly to it, and there told the lad to sound the assembly. It had the desired effect. In their confusion the men were only too glad to be told what to do, and rallied to the call with great celerity.

Having ranged his men in the hollows it contained, he determined to stand on the defensive till daybreak, and then commenced to ascertain as far as possible the casualties sustained in this disastrous attack. He was afraid they were heavy, but when it came to counting those who had rallied to the bugle, as compared with those who had disembarked from the steamer that afternoon, he was aghast at the diminution of their numbers. He was not a man given to call others to his counsels, and as he paced up and down the tank that night, he balanced in his own mind whether it was possible to continue his advance to Arrah in the morning. He was not a man to

shrink from the most daring movement if he thought it possible to attain the desired end thereby, but he was far too good a soldier to throw away the lives of his men recklessly. He understood, no one better, that he was in so critical a position that it was to be questioned whether it was more dangerous to advance than to retire. He knew that the enemy were scarce likely to let them regain the banks of the Sôn without bitter fighting. They were flushed with success, his men were dispirited by defeat. Even if he reached Arrah, it would be almost impossible to bring off the garrison there, and regain the steamer. A few hours' delay would be fatal. "No," he decided at last, "there is nothing left for it, as far as we are concerned, but to leave Arrah to its fate, and if I can only withdraw my own people out of this accursed wasps' nest, without much further loss, I shall have done pretty well."

At daybreak the word was passed to fall in, and Denton led his men back to the Arrah road, but as they regained it, striking it towards the end of the fatal mango grove, used the previous night by the enemy for their ambuscade, it was evident that some few of them still lingered there. Some dozen muskets flashed an angry greeting to them, and Denton

and two or three of his followers fell lifeless by the side of the road. A few skirmishers thrown into the grove, speedily ascertained that the rebels were in no force there. That the attack had been probably delivered by a small party, left for the purpose of watching their movements. The officer who succeeded to the command had quite concurred with Denton as to the necessity for retreat, and further that that retreat should be accomplished with as little delay as possible. It was just one of those occasions which a daring man, gifted with inspiration, might have turned to account; one of those occasions on which the acute strategist, like the scientific chess player, divines the move of his antagonist. Whether it might have occurred to Denton there is no saying; lying senseless as he does, with his face bathed in blood, and Bobby Nuthall bending despairingly over him, he is little likely to offer conjecture concerning the tactics of the enemy. There is no time for the surgeon's services, and drawing, with the assistance of one or two of his men, what he believes to be the corpse of his captain under cover of the edge of the mango grove, Bobby Nuthall sadly resumes his place in the column.

The Sepoys had been quite as alive to the success of their ambuscade as the British.

They had carefully reckoned up what would be the probable move of the latter upon the dawn, and had rapidly arrived at the conclusion that abandoning all hope of raising the siege of Arrah, they would retire upon the Sôn. This they determined to prevent at any price. They vowed amongst themselves that no man of that force should ever see Dinapore again, and how strenuously they endeavoured to keep their word this history will show. Leaving a few hundreds of their force to watch that recalcitrant house at Arrah, where the inmates, strange to say, imbued with the same spirit that had distinguished the famous Mrs. Bond's ducks, declined to come out and be killed, they pushed forward all through the night, occupying every tope, ditch, and jungle that the retiring British would have to pass on their way, and it was more than likely that it would have been an easier task for the little column to fight their way into Arrah than to cut their way back to the Sôn. The column marched straight on, returning in somewhat hap-hazard fashion the fire that was showered on them on their way. They had but one object in view—the reaching of the Sôn. The sheer satisfaction of fighting was denied them. The enemy was practically invisible, sheltered behind trees, copses, and bushes. The muti-

neers kept up a perpetual galling and harassing fire. Again and again the rear guard, maddened by the sight of their falling comrades, would face about with furious desire to charge the enemy, but there was no enemy to charge. If they dashed into the jungle it was only to catch sight of the rapidly retreating forms of the Sepoys. No ; five or six thousand men, consisting of rebels and the levies of Kunwar Singh, taking advantage of the natural obstacles of the country, were shooting our luckless countrymen down as you might do rabbits in a warren, or as you do pheasants in a battue.

Slowly and with severe loss, the shattered column at length gained the rivulet which had been passed upon the preceding evening. It was by no means a broad stream, but still it was deep and did necessitate boats for its passage. Since the previous night the waters had fallen considerably. Many of the boats used on the preceding afternoon were now stranded and useless, and there were apparently only two available for the passage. If it be argued that the other boats might have been brought down to the water it must also be considered that from a demoralised force, hotly pressed by a triumphant enemy, coolness under difficulties is hardly to be expected.

The mutineers, for the first time, now began to show themselves. They knew that once across the rivulet the fugitives would virtually have escaped them. A couple more miles and they would have gained the Sôn, and be under the protection of the guns of the steamer.

Hotly pressed by the swarms of Sepoys, now thirsting for their blood, the crossing of that rivulet became a minature passage of the Borodino. The men were all out of hand. Panic and confusion reigned supreme. Their few officers tried vainly to rally them, and probably half the entire loss of the whole column took place in the crossing of that little stream. Many were shot and many were drowned, until at last the survivors found themselves in comparative safety on the opposite bank. When they mustered there it was found that out of the original column there remained only fifty men and three officers unhurt, and of these latter Bobby Nuthall was fortunate enough to be one. Sadly and disconsolately they made their way to the steamer, and were then carried back to Dinapore.

Left for dead, Denton remained for some time insensible. How long he had lain there he did not know, but the sun had well risen, when he sat up and looked about him. Had

the bullet that stretched him low been a bare quarter of an inch lower in its flight, he would never have looked about him again in this world. As it was, beyond an earth-quaky sort of sensation, he felt that he was unhurt. The ball had grazed his head, and he had lost a considerable quantity of blood ; but otherwise he was little the worse for his misadventure. Still, his situation was critical enough, and for the present his thoughts were so confused, he hardly felt capable of deciding on what it was best for him to do. As far as he could make out, there was no living creature within sight. On the other side of the road he could see the motionless forms of several of his own party ; he raised himself to his feet, and looked both up and down the road. He could see more than one white heap of clothes, marking the route back to the Sôn.

Slowly, he recognised that the mutineers had, in all probability, followed the shattered remains of the column in its retreat, and that all possibility of his rejoining his comrades was thereby prevented. He could not stay where he was ; not only would his discovery be a mere question of hours, but his discovery meant his death ; and he was no more disposed to part with his life in cold

blood, than are mankind generally, when it comes to the point. He had no alternative ; the sole chance left him, was to join the garrison of Arrah ; it was an attempt probably fraught with difficulty and danger ; he would, most likely, perish in the attempt, but it was the sole thing that remained for him to do ; and as his senses became clearer, it struck him that, if not all, the greater part of the mutineers were hanging on the tracks of the beaten column, and that, in all likelihood, there was only a small portion of them keeping watch upon the Arrah garrison.

It may be remembered that the mango grove was about a mile only from the station, and therefore it would take very little time to try the experiment. He pushed forward as cautiously as he could, and speedily found himself amongst some ruined and deserted bungalows, which he rightly guessed was the small white cantonment of the station.

The native town was a full half-mile further on, but the sharp crack of rifles only some few hundred yards away from him, told him that he must have reached the vicinity of the building, in which the Europeans of Arrah were still defending themselves. Creeping cautiously along behind walls and hedges, he, at last, got to a place from whence he could ob-

tain an excellent view of the situation. There, curiously enough, stood the beleaguered house, and not two hundred yards from it was the bigger house which formed the stronghold of the mutineers. A curious sight; it was a duel between two miniature fortresses, and, just at present, somewhat slackly conducted; the truth being, that the small number of Sepoys left awaited the return of their comrades, before pressing the attack, whilst the Englishmen knew better than to waste their ammunition. It soon became quite clear to Denton what his line must be. After carefully reconnoitring, he must steal up as near as possible to the besieged house, and then make one dash for it across the open.

He quickly made his way to the point nearest the entrance of the defendants' fortress that he could reach without exposing himself, and saw that he should then have some hundred and fifty yards to cross, as he best could. He had not much fear of the Sepoys hitting him, as he ran across that; his one danger would be if there was much delay in admitting him, and from this he was fortunately saved by an accident. Miss Lepel, peeping cautiously from an upper window, chanced to see Denton break cover. She recognised at once that it was a European, and, as she

rightly conjectured, a fugitive from last night's disaster, for the gradual dying away of the firing had told the garrison at Arrah that the force despatched for their salvation had been repulsed. Quick as thought she dashed down the staircase, and told the men by the door what she had seen. Two of them ran to the door, while Cole immediately sprang to one of the loopholes.

"It's all right," he cried; "it's an officer, and I doubt he brings us bad news. Stand by at the door; the Sepoys have caught sight of him, and are blazing at him like mad." Another instant, and the panels are struck sharply from the outside; the door opens immediately in response, and Denton, passing in, gazes round upon the besieged, with whom necessity has compelled him to take refuge. His astonishment knew no bounds when, facing him, he saw the young lady whom he had so much admired at the Hunt Ball in Kent. Covered with blood and grimed with powder, Molly did not, in the least, recognise the fugitive, and it was not till he exclaimed:

"Miss Lepel, don't you know me?" that she cried in tones of astonishment, "Captain Denton!"

Such was our hero's "Baptism of Fire."

CHAPTER XI.

“ MINE AND COUNTER-MINE.”

FAWCETT, Cole, and the other Englishmen, now crowded round Denton, anxious to learn the particulars of last night's fighting, but Molly quickly interfered in his behalf.

“ You are wounded, Captain Denton,” she said, “ I think the doctor had better look to your hurts, before we listen to the bad news I am afraid you bring us.”

“ I am very little hurt,” he replied. “ Nothing beyond what a little cold water and a plaster will speedily put to rights. Last time I saw you, Miss Lepel, I was regretting I had never seen active service. I little thought my *début* was to be made in such miserable fashion.”

“ Ah! you were beaten back, then,” said the Judge, “ we feared so from the manner in which the firing rolled away from us.”

“ Yes,” said Denton, somewhat bitterly, “ we were caught like rats in a trap, when we got within about a mile of you, and they will have hard work to regain the banks of the Sôn, I fear.”

"But how did you escape?" enquired Cole.

"I take it I was left for dead on the field, but the bullet, fortunately for me, only grazed my head, instead of going through it, and after being insensible for some time, I recovered, to find myself the only living creature on the scene of last night's disaster. We were retreating when I was knocked over. The column was out of sight when I came to myself, with, I take it, pretty near the whole of the rebels at its heels."

"Yes, that would be it, no doubt" remarked Fawcett, "they are very languid in their attacks this morning, but their comrades will be back, no doubt, in the course of the day, and then they will press us hard again."

"Still," rejoined Cole, "they know we're beleaguered, at Dinapore; and I have no doubt another force will be despatched to our rescue."

"Your situation is thoroughly understood," replied Denton, "and I think we may be pretty certain that another effort will be made to relieve us before long, but these fellows are too numerous to handle without artillery. A couple of field guns with us last night, and a little more caution in our advance, and we might have had a different story to tell; and now," he continued, "as

soon as I've washed a little of all this dirt off me, I shall be fit for duty, and at the disposal of whoever commands you."

Ere the day was over, tumultuous shouting, and much firing of muskets announced the return of the victorious mutineers. Almost immediately the fire from the big house increased in intensity, and the slightest exposure on the part of the besieged, was sufficient to cause the discharge of a dozen or so of muskets. At sundown the Sepoys, standing behind one of the pillars of the big house, summoned the defendants to surrender, in sonorous tones, but the little garrison received the summons, as usual, with contemptuous indifference. Not only had they stout hearts amongst them, but the Englishmen were men with much knowledge of India, and knew that it was better to die with their faces to the foe, than to trust to the mercies of rebellious Sepoys, mad with blood and plunder.

As soon as Denton had washed away the traces of last night's fray, and had his head looked at by the surgeon, he at once asked for a rifle and put himself at Cole's disposal. The two men speedily took to each other. They were of that type of which England has ever found many in her hour of need, men whom no difficulties or dangers daunt, and who stick

to their designs with a bull-dog pertinacity, that considerably lessens the chance of failure in everything they may undertake. Cole, too, was gratified by another piece of delicacy upon the part of Denton. He had thought most unjustly that, as a military man, the latter might consider he had a right to take charge of the defence, but such an idea had never crossed Denton's mind. He placed himself at once under Cole's orders, as a simple volunteer, having ascertained from Miss Lepel that it was the civil engineer who had prepared their fortress, and so far conducted the defence of the place. Cole lost no time, but showing him rapidly all over the house, pointed out to him their weak places, and then said :

"Like all other sieges that I've read of, we must simply hold out as long as we can, and make good any damage the enemy may do our defences as we best can. I don't know what sort of a shot you are, but if you are a good rifle man you will be of very great value to us. We are fortunate in having Judge Lepel and Fawcett here, who in pursuit of big game have learnt to shoot with deadly accuracy. The Sepoys, remember, have no rifles, and make but wild practice with their muskets ; furthermore they lose heart con-

siderably the minute four or five of them get knocked over.

The morrow showed that the Sepoys now meant prosecuting the siege in bitter earnest. They had taken advantage of the night to build a large bonfire within some twenty or thirty yards of the house. Although their movements had not altogether escaped the vigilance of the sentries, and although more than once the muskets of the Sikhs had flashed fierce defiance through the night air, yet they were unable to detect what the enemy were about, nor could their fire be expected to prove very deterrent in the darkness. The besieged were all puzzled when they saw this pile of wood and brush in the morning. What could it mean. The wind certainly sets from that quarter, but they can hardly hope to fire the house from that distance. Practical Cole, however, rapidly rose to the occasion.

"I understand it no more than the rest of you," he remarked drily, "but of one thing we may be certain, that it is not intended for our benefit. I think, Judge, if you, Fawcett and Captain Denton would just occupy the loop-holes commanding it, and make it the most unsafe possible piece of work to continue, it would be advisable."

Cole's order was promptly obeyed, and before half-an-hour had elapsed, some half-dozen Sepoys stretched lifeless alongside the pile had convinced their comrades that the continuing of that work was best postponed till nightfall. Once more a storm of musketry rattled about the walls of the little house, and it quickly struck Cole and Denton that this was merely to mask some other operation for their destruction. Still, the besiegers were not going to waste cartridges. Like the immortal Ralph de Shurland, they recognised that there were no windows to break, and that the foe could not get in; but they felt it was no time to emulate his serenity and go to bed. Towards the afternoon, the new idea of the enemy became developed, and it was easy to see that he had succeeded in hoisting a small field-gun to the roof of the big house; but to the mounting of that piece, the defendants were able to put in a severe demurrer. The small house stood upon higher ground, and thus commanded the big, and from its roof the Judge, Fawcett and Denton's deadly tubes effectually checked all attempts to get the gun in position as long as the light lasted.

"They will mount it to-night," said Denton, as the trio descended from the

housetop, "but as to what damage it may inflict upon us, that we can't know till they open fire. I suppose you think I am all wrong, but I feel more uncomfortable about that bonfire than the gun. I suppose," he said, with a laugh, "the danger we don't understand always carries more terrors than the one we do."

All through the night the besieged could hear the Sepoys busy about the bonfire they were raising, and though the angry muskets of the Sikhs spit fitfully and waspishly through the darkness, they did little harm; nor did they hinder the mutineers' operations to any great extent. With the morning came a thing the besieged thought little of at the time, which was ultimately destined to be of the greatest possible service to them—to wit considerable vacillation on the part of the wind. As Denton had foretold, the Sepoys had got their small field-gun into position during the darkness, and lost no time in trying its effect.

"Well, Captain Denton, what do you say?" exclaimed Cole after the first discharge, and as he saw a foot or two of the small earthen parapet that surrounded the roof of the house knocked to pieces.

"That gun," rejoined Denton, "was loaded

with odds and ends. My impression is, they have got no proper ammunition. Moreover our rifles ought as yet to keep the fire of that gun under. Their gunners, so far, have scant protection. Let them fire another shot, and then I'll guarantee the judge, myself, and the collector will spoil their practice."

They had not to wait long. Boom came another shot, and this time, no doubt it was a genuine six-pounder.

"It is getting time this sort of thing was put a stop to," said Denton, grimly, as he dropped a double-barrelled rifle he had selected from the armoury into the hollow of his left hand. Another minute and an energetic Sepoy, busied about the gun, sprang high in the air and then fell dead by its side. There was evident consternation on the roof of the big house at this shot. The slain man was a native officer, and the rebels had a wholesome terror of the Sahib's rifles. They were aware that these Englishmen were in possession of weapons that not only carried much farther than their own, but were much more accurate in the hands of an expert, and they had already learnt that amongst the besieged were some deadly marksmen. Had they possessed the courage to rush or storm the house the superiority of these marksmen would have

gone for very little, but so long as they chose to play the game of long bowls, then such shots as the Judge, Fawcett, and Denton, with arms of precision in their hands, scored heavily against their assailants. Although unable to entirely silence the field piece, yet the deadly fire of the besiegers kept it down considerably, and another thing that the defendants noted with great satisfaction, was that the Sepoys were short of regular ammunition for their piece of artillery.

Still, at intervals the big gun boomed all through the day, while the musketry fire was incessant, and during the night they could hear the besiegers busily at work at their bonfire, and just as day dawned, they set fire to it. Cole, who was on the roof, after one steady gaze at the burning pile through a field glass suddenly exclaimed, "The crafty devils! Look through the glass, Denton; all the top part is simply chilis, the raw material of the red pepper. If the wind does not stand our friend now, there will be nothing for it but to make a sortie, and endeavour to put out that fire.

"There will be no necessity for a sortie," rejoined Denton. "Luckily for us the wind is taking the smoke well away from us. Had it blown our way, I doubt whether we should have been able to stand it. However, in this

case, it is the engineer hoisted with his own petard, and only that, fortunately for themselves, their house lies very much further than ours from that blazing pile, they would have had to temporarily raise the siege at any rate.

All through that afternoon the Sepoys manifested great activity, and it was soon apparent that they had succeeded in getting a second gun on to the roof of their house, but profiting by their former experiences, they deferred mounting it till after sunset. The bonfire, it is true, had done the besieged no harm, nor had the first gun, so far, but they were all indications of the enemy's determination to press the siege with vigour. Still, the besieged had proved themselves fully equal to every emergency, so far, but they could not get over the fact that supplies were running short, and in fact already the supply of water was beginning to fail them.

However, Cole was a man of great fertility of resource ; and acting under his directions, in a very few hours they had dug a well, and struck water, so that their minds were at rest with regard to that great essential. It was not long before they discovered that the enemy were busily engaged driving a mine their way, and Cole and Denton at once set themselves to meet this with a counter-mine, leaving

Fawcett and the Judge on the roof, to keep in check the artillery fire of their assailants. These two, aided by a few of the Sikh soldiers, set to work with a will, and so accurately had Cole divined the track of the enemy's mine, that ere long they could hear the faint sound of the Sepoys' working tools. After listening for some time, Denton came out of the gallery and said to Cole, "I have stopped work simply because I should say they are making dead for us, but go in and listen, and see what you make of it."

After a few minutes Cole returned and rejoined, "I should say that I've gauged them to a foot. I should think they will work straight into our gallery."

"Now," said Denton, "I am going to ask you, just to leave this to me. They surprised us the other night, and I should just like to give them a little surprise in their turn."

"What are you going to do," enquired Cole.

"I am just going to sit in that gallery in the dark till they break through, and the leader of that party will never see sunlight again."

"Yes, that will be the best way. I think we may leave the mine in your hands for the present."

Another moment, with his revolver at his

belt, and a dark lantern in his hand, Denton was once more crawling towards the head of the shaft. Having arrived there, he drew the shade over his lantern, loosened his revolver in his belt, and awaited events. Tick ! Tick ! Click ! Click ! the faint sound gets stronger and stronger every minute. He has crouched there more than an hour, and it was now evident that his foes were very near at hand. Louder and louder grows the click, click ; he can even hear the voices as the man at the head of the shaft passes back the earth he has dug out, to be in its turn passed out of the gallery by his followers.

It is evident they are working very hard; a few minutes more, and the pickaxe comes through. He can hear the exclamation of surprise with which the Sepoy finds that he has broken into a chamber of some sort. Under the impression that he has struck a cellar, he quickly enlarges the hole, then raising his lantern he peers through, to see what manner of place this is he has got into. That he is never destined to know. Ere his eyes can take in the details, Denton's bullet crashes through the brain of the luckless rebel, and he can hear the other Sepoys wriggling their way back out of the gallery, as fast as they can scuttle.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SORTIE.

"CAPTAIN DENTON, I hear you've done us splendid service," said Miss Lepel, as she encountered him, covered with dust, after that little adventure in the mine.

"I don't know about that," he rejoined with a smile. "Cole, if you like, did splendid service by the exact accuracy with which his counter-mine was laid. Any one of us could have played my part in the business, but I had a personal grudge to resent, and begged permission to do so. You see the Sepoys outwitted us on our way down here, and to return that compliment was a temptation not to be resisted."

"I quite understand," rejoined Molly, meaningly; "but, in the meantime—don't think Mrs. Cole and I are in despair about it, but the larder is getting low, and we shall shortly have to serve you up that famous old border dish, which the dames of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were wont to send up to their lords."

"Ah! the spurs," said Denton, laughing;

"as a hint to the goodman of the house, that it was time he rode on the foray. Not much difficulty about that, Miss Lepel. A dash in the night time, covered by a sharp fire from the house, against these curs, promptly carried out, would entail very little risk upon us. Still," he continued with a smile, "you must give us one more night before you serve the spurs, because one essential of a dash of this nature is to know what you are dashing for."

"Quite so, my lord," replied Molly with a mock curtsey. "We will give you yet a few hours to study where live the fattest of beeves or the best gram-fed sheep."

"I must look at it again," rejoined Denton, "but it strikes me, there is a small go-down adjoining the house opposite, which is given up to the finest sheep the rebels have been able to lay their hands on, reserved I fancy, for the dainty appetites of their leaders. In all great upheavals the scum that come temporarily to the top always revel in the indulgence of their sensual appetites. Robespierre, 'The Incorruptible,' I have no doubt, indulged freely in champagne and truffles, ere he took his seat in the tumbrils, while the bloodthirsty Marat, doubtless, was particular about his Chambertin and pâtés, till that little interview with Charlotte Corday so abruptly

terminated his career. I will have my eye, Miss Lepel, on that out-house this afternoon, and if I think it is worth going for, we'll see what is in it to-night."

"Nonsense, Captain Denton, you will pay no such serious attention to the words of a girl like me. All I mean is this, that if you, Mr. Cole and the others, see a fair chance of a successful foray, more provisions will be very acceptable. Neither Mrs. Cole nor I are nervous, we have perfect faith in your ability to beat the enemy off for many a day yet, but you must be fed, you know, and as Mrs. Cole says, 'dinner is ever a weight on a good housekeeper's mind.'"

A new difficulty, with men like Cole and Denton, was simply a thing to be overcome. If more food was wanted, and Cole perfectly understood that it well might be, well then, more food must be procured in some way or other. Close upon seventy souls take a considerable amount of feeding, and extensively as Cole had victualled his house, still he had never contemplated providing for so large a garrison as was now within its walls. Not that he could have wished them to be a man less, for had it not been for their numbers, they would by this have been worn down by sheer bodily fatigue; but they were strong enough to indulge; a third of them taking their

much needed rest at a time ; and give men only fairly sufficient food and some six or seven hours' sleep, and they will last a long time, let the work be never so hard. Cole and Denton studied this out-house for some time during that afternoon, the latter also occupying himself with prompt use of his rifle, whenever the Sepoys in their over-eagerness to use their artillery exposed themselves. Indeed, the bitter sharp-shooting of himself, the judge, and Fawcett had made the working of those field pieces a job not exactly suited to the enemy's taste. The two watchers could not make out exactly what was in the go-down. They saw Sepoys twice disappear into it with buckets, evidently, by the way they were carried—full, and by the way they were brought back—as equally evident—empty.

"We must hope it's sheep," said Denton, at last, "though it may be bullocks; but if they're eatable animals, I should think it is most likely the former. Still there is one thing clear, they keep animals of some kind there, and we can only trust they are of an eatable nature."

"Pretty sure to be that," laughed Cole. "The most important question is, are they portable? Sheep you could kill, and carry off easily, but bullocks would be awkward, no time to drive them and too heavy to carry dead."

"With your permission I'll give them a look in to-night at any rate," rejoined Denton.

It was resolved to wait till midnight before making the proposed raid on the enemy's live stock. Confident in their numbers, the Sepoys never dreamed of the initiative being taken by those whom they already regarded as their prey. That the besieged when driven to extremities, might make a desperate attempt to escape in the darkness, they looked upon as probable, but they could trust their scouts and sentries to detect such a movement as that, and were only too anxious that the finish should come in that wise. They knew that the little band's chance would be hopeless in the open. Shortly after the moon was down, fifteen of the Sikhs, headed by Cole and Denton, stole noiselessly out of a loop-holed side door, and made their way across the compound towards the big house. They got pretty close to it, and then dashed at the go-down they coveted sharply. The one sentry near it was cut down by Denton, though not before he had fired his musket. But it was so common a practice of the mutineers to occasionally discharge their pieces in the direction of the small house during the night, that it did not attract so much attention as it otherwise

would have done. Still the breaking open of the door of the outhouse, and the prompt shooting of half-a-score of the sheep it contained, speedily aroused the mutineers from their slumbers. A cry arose that the Feringhees were upon them, and panic for a moment seized upon the rebels. Their first impression was that the English had surprised them, they never dreamt that the besieged had had the audacity to make a sortie. But in a very few minutes they became aware that their assailants were but a handful, and awoke to the real state of the case. Then they discharged their muskets wildly in every direction, and turned out in hundreds to annihilate the intruders. But those few minutes' delay had been invaluable. The Sikhs had slain as many sheep as they could conveniently carry, and the little party was rapidly retreating across the compound, to its own quarters. It had been a most successful foray, and the foragers regained their house with only one trifling casualty. One Sikh, indeed, owed his immunity to his burden, for a couple of random bullets had buried themselves in the sheep he was carrying.

The two ladies were waiting in the inner hall, under the orders of the doctor, in expectation of having wounded men to see to,

and the one sufferer was speedily placed in their hands.

"A splendid haul, Miss Lepel," cried Denton, laughing. "If we can only find out another butcher's shop or two to clear out, you need never fear that the larder won't be kept plentifully filled. I wish you could have seen our procession back. Ten men, each carrying a dead sheep, Cole, myself, and the five others, covering the retreat."

"You've done splendidly," replied the girl, "and, best of all; without loss. When I heard their yells and the musketry I was afraid some of you would never come back."

"That fellow Denton," said Cole aside to the Collector, "fairly revels in a row. Before this mutiny is put down he will have avenged a good many European lives, if he is not knocked over."

It is not very easy to imagine the feelings of hard, ruthless natures, such as Denton's, at that time. They felt that no possible reprisals could be too much on the murderers of women and children. Then again the military instinct was strong to boot. These were soldiers who had risen and in many cases murdered their own officers. Men like Denton would have fain made it a war without quarter, and indeed such record as there is

shows that whole regiments of Pandies were exterminated without mercy. Still, though their hearts never sank, yet the besieged knew that the time must come, if they were not rescued, when they would be at the end of their resources, and nothing would remain for them but to die.

At Dinapore, when the broken remains of Dunbar's column reached there, it was looked upon that the fate of Arrah was sealed. What could a handful of Europeans and fifty Sikhs do against six thousand trained troops and a large body of irregulars? And yet, our whole history of India teems with triumphant answers to such a question. But already there was one man who believed that a dozen or so of Englishmen with fifty Sikh soldiers behind them would take a deal of putting out of any place they had made up their mind to hold, by any Sepoys, however numerous. Eyre's scouts had already brought him information that Arrah still held out, and he was even now advancing, though the garrison knew it not, rapidly to their relief. In the meanwhile the Sepoys redoubled their fire upon the small house, did their best to tamper with the Sikhs, and were pertinacious in summoning the garrison to surrender. One thing only did they carefully abstain from doing, they

shrank from risking their rebel skins in an assault. A curious illustration of how odds may be disregarded by the European when brought face to face with the Asiatic, is to be found in the siege of Lucknow. The European garrison held out until relieved by Sir Colin Campbell at the Residency for eighty-four days. When the city was in its turn beleaguered by the English the Asiatics occupied the abandoned Residency in considerable force. But it fell to Outram's victorious advance in about half-an-hour.

For the next two days the fire of the rebels was unceasing. Despite the sharp rifle-fire from the little house, they worked their two guns with considerable activity. Still the defenders made good every night the damage inflicted during the day, and the mutineers were made to feel by the marksmen of the little house that the working of those guns was fraught with considerable danger. Many of them fell beneath the deadly bullets of the Judge, Fawcett and Denton. The besieged had made two dashing sorties in search of provender, but their assailants were now thoroughly on the *qui vive*. The results had been simply the loss of two of their Sikh soldiers and the wounding of some half-a-dozen more of the party, amongst which latter, the last time, must be included the Collector.

One morning, Cole and Denton, keenly studying their opponents' position with their glasses, agreed that, as far as they could judge, there was a considerable diminution in their numbers. Certain it was that the attack was no longer pushed with the energy of the two preceding days, and in the afternoon the garrison fancied they could hear the faint boom of cannon in the distance. Whether it really was the case, or whether it portended the slightest good to them, they had no conception. But it was an anxious time for the chiefs of the defence. Cole and Denton had taken accurate stock of the provisions that morning, and had come to the conclusion that, even on half rations, four or five days was the most they could prolong their resistance. Still the slackening of the besiegers' efforts was a favourable sign, and then again was this really the boom of artillery that they had heard in the far distance, or had they imagined it? A singularly quiet night, and the next day Cole and his colleague became more than ever convinced that the mutineers for some reason or other had withdrawn the main portion of their force from Arrah. Can this mean that relief is nigh, and again, is it this time destined to be successful? In the course of the afternoon the thunder of Eyre's

guns fell distinctly upon their ears, and there could be little doubt that a force of some kind with artillery at its back was advancing their way. Another quiet night, but a reconnaissance still shows that the enemy are in possession of the big house and keenly alive to any intrusion on their premises. They turn out promptly, and send their bullets freely hissing into the darkness.

At daybreak the besieged are struck with the unnatural quiet that has fallen upon the cantonment. The usual salvo of artillery with which they are accustomed to be regaled from the top of the big house, is omitted. Not a musket is discharged ; there are neither the derisive shouts of the mutineers, nor the clang of their brass instruments to be heard. What can be the meaning of this portentous stillness ? Is it a ruse of the enemy to lure them from their fortress, or can it be possible that, terrified at the advance of some relieving force, the mutineers have retired ? For some hours they so mistrust ambuscade and treachery, that they still cling closely to their citadel ; but as the morning draws on, Denton and a handful of trusty Sikhs determine to reconnoitre. They creep out, and the stillness is of death ; not a shot is fired at them, not a sound but the faint sigh

of the wind through the trees, breaks the stillness of the compound. From the native town itself, comes no sign of life. It almost gives the idea that Arrah is deserted of man, save that little band in the small house. Cautiously they feel their way, but no, not a Sepoy is in sight, not a musket flashes angry defiance at them. Quickly Denton comes to the conclusion that the big house is abandoned. He makes his way there at once, and finds that his surmise is correct. He scours it from basement to roof, finding everywhere traces of a hasty stampede. The two light field-pieces on the top of the house, are still left standing, but there is most assuredly not a rebel left within its walls.

The little party now pushed forward in the direction of the native town. As far as the mutineers went, that also was abandoned, but the luckless shopkeepers and sowcars in the bazaar sat cowering in their respective places of business. Like most of their class, the mutiny had brought sore tribulation to them. They had been looted by the mutineers, and knew not what they might expect from the advancing Feringhees. One thing only was clear. The leaguer of the small house at Arrah was raised.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT CALCUTTA.

IT was not long before their deliverers made their appearance. Arrah was relieved, but Eyre made no long stay at that station. He had plenty to do elsewhere, and carrying off with him the gallant band that had made such a heroic defence, he pushed off, to, if possible, annihilate Kunwar Singh, but speedily discovered that the beaten rebels had fled towards their original point, Delhi, while the crafty old landowner had betaken himself, at the head of his followers, temporarily to the jungle ; destined to give much trouble yet, this recalcitrant Talookdar, before his career should be finished. As soon as possible, the Lepels and Denton made their way to Dinapore, where the latter's reappearance struck Mr. Nuthall and one or two other officers dumb with amazement.

“ It isn’t your ghost ! ” exclaimed Bobby at last, as he wrung his captain’s hand for about two minutes. “ I saw you knocked over, and helped to drag you into the grove, where I left you for dead. If we had had an idea there was any life in you, we would

have struggled hard to carry you with us. Whether we should have succeeded, Heaven knows ; there were not many of us reached the banks of the Sôn again."

"Ah ! I guessed as much," replied Denton quietly. "Those fellows, I suppose, hung on your rear till you reached the river, and there were such swarms of them, that it was almost a wonder they did not annihilate you."

"But what became of you ? Let's hear how you escaped."

"Well," rejoined Denton, "mine, you see, was a case which the Irish so delicately distinguish. 'I was kilt, but not kilt dead.' When I recovered my senses, I made my way into Arrah ; we've had a roughish time there, but we kept them at bay, until Eyre came to our relief, and gave those Dinapore mutineers a proper thrashing. He had guns with him, and, by Jove ! he knows how to use them."

"You're just in time," replied Bobby, "we move on in a day or two."

Denton asked nothing better. The successful defence of Arrah, and the loss they had inflicted on the mutineers during the siege, had been some salve to his feelings, but the terrible disaster that had befallen Dunbar's column still rankled in his mind, and he felt

that he had a personal score to settle with the rebels. Before they marched, however, he had to say good-bye to Molly, and he no longer concealed from himself that he had conceived a great admiration for that young lady. Still, this was no time for whispering a love tale into a girl's ear; there was man's work before him, as he knew for many a month as yet, and march and counter-march, and stubborn fighting, before that terrible blaze in Bengal should be finally stamped out.

"Well, Miss Lepel," he said, "I've come to bid you good-bye. I little thought when we met at Maidstone, that my first bit of active service was to be done side by side with yourself. You deserve a decoration for your pluck and spirit, as much as any of us, if ever they give a ribbon for this campaign."

"I don't know about that," replied Molly, laughing. "Mr. Cole, Mr. Fawcett, dear Papa, and yourself, would have inspired any girl, with courage. Mrs. Cole and myself did our best to be useful in our own way. I hope we were, we found plenty of woman's work to do—"

"And did it right well," he interposed warmly, "we have all much to thank you for. Yes, one and all did their best," he continued, with a flash of enthusiasm, "and the

result was we succeeded, as we shall in the future. There is warm work before us, doubtless, but we've plenty of leaders who don't know what being beaten means."

"Captain Denton," rejoined Molly, "you can't suppose that I, who saw what a handful of you did with the thousands of mutineers who surrounded us at Arrah, can have much doubt about the ultimate triumph of England. I don't know what my destination is exactly, but I am to be sent out of harm's way, and I fancy that means Calcutta. I hope we shall meet again some day and talk over the siege of the small house at Arrah."

"We shall meet again, if I live," replied Denton, in a low tone, "as I shall have something to say to you then, which, with what lies before me, it would be unfair to say now."

Molly's lips quivered as she stretched out her hand to bid him farewell. Her heart was by no means out of her own keeping as yet, but she liked him, she admired his cool courage, and firm, resolute manner, and then she had gone through deadly peril with this man by her side. He was going forth, into what, it was only too clear, was a whirlpool of bitter strife, and though if Molly had been asked she would have said that she had little fear for this dauntless paragon of hers, yet it

is the best and the bravest who always fall on such occasions, so that Molly's voice might well shake a little as she bade him adieu. Denton did not know it, but it may be doubted whether any direct declaration of his love would have served his turn so well.

Once at the front, and Denton soon became a man of mark. With iron nerve, and untiring energy, he joined—what so many of the heroes of the mutiny times then got their first chance of showing they possessed—a thoroughly military instinct. They say that poets are born, not made, and the same may be said of military chiefs. Denton soon acquired the character of being a cool, if ruthless partisan—a man who revelled in daring and dangerous exploits, reckless of his own person, and pitiless in the pursuit of a beaten enemy. The Black Captain, as he was dubbed, in consequence of his swarthy complexion, soon became a name of terror to the mutineers. During his previous career in the country he had acquired the language, and soon succeeded in obtaining permission to raise a body of irregular horse, and thus arrived at an independent command. He picked his men carefully, and had already made himself such a reputation that the Sikhs flocked to his standard. He very soon

had these men in capital order, and after two or three experiments, felt that he could lead them anywhere, or at anything. Like many other such irregular regiments, Denton's Horse speedily acquired a renown equal to that of Hodson's or Probyn's, though, like the former of those officers, he bore the reputation of being merciless in his hour of triumph.

It may be all very well, looking back over a quarter of a century, to talk of the lesson read the mutineers in those days being administered with exceeding bitterness, but it must be borne in mind, that it was dealt by men who had seen the brutal barbarities of the Sepoys to their countrymen, aye, and women, committed almost under their very eyes. “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,” but I fancy that man under these circumstances, will ever take prompt reprisal into his own hand when able. If the Sepoys had jeered with fiendish glee at the massacres of Nana Sahib, it was with grim satisfaction that our soldiery saw them blown away from guns, by scores, and there was little quarter either given or expected during the fierce series of assaults that characterised the taking of Lucknow. It does not come within the scope of this story to follow Denton through that famous siege, or the subsequent wild work that accom-

panied the conquest of Oude, but Miss Lepel, who had been safely consigned to the care of old friends of the judge's, at Calcutta, had no difficulty in following the career of her admirer in the papers. He was Major Denton now, and his name well known to all the prominent chiefs of the English army. As was said of a gallant soldier who died but yesterday, in the arms of victory, "Ah, Denton will get there somehow, whatever may be in the way."

It was hard and ceaseless work, that final repression of the mutiny.

The marching and forced marching seemed interminable. There was perpetual fighting, and yet it was fighting so constantly without satisfactory result ; there was no getting the rebels to make a determined stand, they retreated precipitately as soon as ever they found themselves getting the worst of it, and as they always outmarched our men, the English soldiers tramped many a wearisome mile with no result. In Central India, the ubiquitous Tantia Topee crossed and recrossed the Nerbudda, but baffled all attempts to bring him to bay. He half broke the hearts of many a dashing leader, who thought they had pinned him at last, by the dexterity of his evasions.

Our old friend Kunwar Singh was another of the same sort, as difficult to bring to book as the moss troopers of the Scottish border, who would fight or fly, just as it pleased them, but the old Rajpoot chief's hour had come.

After plotting a daring raid on Benares, then almost destitute of garrison, he was, more by good luck than generalship, arrested when his success looked assured. Although by no means defeated in the action which checked his career, he withdrew precipitately, but not before a grape shot had shattered his hand, which rendered amputation at the wrist necessary. The shock was too great for the old warrior, and one of our bitterest and ablest foes troubled us no longer.

The Moulvie also had fallen, and Tantia Topee soon afterwards shared his doom, and with these three fell all of the insurgents that had ever displayed military capacity. Nana Sahib, it was true, had eluded our grasp, but, though he had been the falsest of our foes and no man in all Hindostan had so well merited death at our hands, still he had never shown himself a general in the slightest degree. He disappeared, and his fate still seems involved in as much mystery as what has become of the lost tribes of Israel. The fierce struggle of the last two years is over, and the

mutiny is at length stamped out. Neither rebellious Sepoy nor discontented Talookdar offers further resistance to the conqueror.

Oude lies prostrate at the feet of the Feringhee, but none of her nobles or land-owners dream of contending further against their kismet. The commander-in-chief is so thoroughly satisfied that the work is effectually done, that it is made known that officers wishing for leave may now send in their applications; and after the long and arduous campaign they have undergone, it is only natural that many should snatch at the opportunity of a few months in which to run home and see their friends. Such had been the dire necessity of the case, that many of the officers had sailed for the East without saying good-bye to those near and dear to them, and, now that perhaps one of the most bloodthirsty wars of latter times had been brought to a conclusion, were only too glad to go back and see how it fared with those they loved.

Miss Lepel was down again at Calcutta. She had never set eyes upon Denton since he had bidden her good-bye at Dinapore, and did not even at present know where he was. She had read, as we know, plenty concerning his doings, in the papers, but, with the suppression of the great mutiny, there came

naturally, a cessation of deeds of derring-do, and the whereabouts of these paladins was by no means so easy to trace. She was driving one evening with some friends, when their carriage pulled up to listen to the band. It was after sunset, and the darkness made it difficult to distinguish people at a little distance, unless they stepped within range of the lights of the music-stands.

Suddenly, a voice fell upon her ear, that she had a vague notion of having heard before, though she had no recollection of when or where. It came from a little knot of men who were, apparently, discussing some subject with considerable animation. The speaker, indeed, was waxing vehement in the statement of his opinion.

"Don't tell me," he said; "Red Rock will win clever enough. I believe he is a good horse, but it's not that; I'm backing the man. I've seen him across country and between flags, and I've seen him lead those troopers of his by six lengths into action, and I tell you he's bad to beat, whatever he puts his hand to. His head and nerve never fail him, and, whatever you may think, you will see he'll pull Red Rock through to-morrow."

"You're wrong this time, Nuts," replied Palliser; "Bedouin is too fast for him. If it is a

strong run race, you will see Denton in difficulties by the time he gets to the quarter mile post."

"Perhaps so," replied Bobby; "and he is never more dangerous, than when he is in difficulties. Why, look at that first precious mess we were in in this country, when poor Dunbar's column was destroyed. Wasn't he left for dead on the field, and hasn't he been fighting for a couple of years since?"

His opponent laughed as he replied, "Your argument hardly holds water, Bobby; because a man escaped with his life from that disaster, it doesn't at all follow that he can win upon a horse which, according to your own acknowledgment, is scarce likely to prove fast enough." But here the speaker moved out of earshot, and Miss Lepel heard no more. She had failed to recognise who Denton's enthusiastic supporter was, though still under the impression that she had met him somewhere. However, it was clear that Denton was in Calcutta. How long had he been there? Did he know she was there? And was it likely that he bore in memory those last words he had said to her at Dinapore? Molly had taken a strange interest in his career, and it was one of which any woman attached to him might be proud. She had thought a

great deal of him, and read the account of some of his hairbreadth escapes with tingling pulses. She was strangely silent as they drove home, and confessed to herself that she should like to hear those words that Denton had refrained from speaking at Dinapore. One thing only was clear to Miss Lepel, and that was, that she must see this race on the morrow ; and then she resolved to make one of her admirers happy, by giving him a commission to discover all particulars concerning it, without delay. The young gentleman to whom she was about to entrust her commission, proved able to give her the desired information off-hand.

"It's not a regular race-meeting, Miss Lepel. Just a sort of bye-day, you know ; but the weather is getting so jolly hot, that it will come off early in the morning ; the race you allude to, is the big thing on the card. A sweepstakes, knocked up the other night at a dinner at the Bengal Club ; and then there's a match or two, and another race or so, to make out the morning's sport. If you'll let me call for you a little before six, I shall be proud to escort you and Mrs. Callander there."

"Thank you, very much ; we will take care to be ready."

CHAPTER XIV.

“ ONE RACE TOO MANY.”

LOUNGING in the verandah of the Bengal Club are two men engaged in rather earnest conversation. A small table stands between them, garnished with goblets of cooling drink. They are seated in rocking-chairs and sweetening their talk with the consumption of tobacco. Denton, for he is one of the smokers, is somewhat changed since we saw him last. Naturally dark, he has been burnt still darker by exposure to the sun ; his face, always hard, has grown still more stern, owing to the work of the last two years ; but a shrewd observer might have noticed also a worn, wearied look about him that was wanting in the days of the leaguer of Arrah. The tall, spare figure gave no indication of illness, but the man himself was conscious of there being something the matter, although it would have puzzled him to say what ; like many others, he was suffering from the re-action. During all the desperate fighting through Bengal he had had, to use his own words, “No time to be ill,” but the

extreme tension once relaxed, he, like many another, not only had time to be so, but was. There was nothing tangible the matter, only that perpetual feeling of lassitude that comes when the physical forces have been unduly strained for a long period. Quiet and perfect rest are the sole remedies, and if not had recourse to, this weariness is apt to be but the prelude of serious illness. Many of those who went through that trying campaign broke down when their work was accomplished.

"It's no use, Nuts. I tell you, you've made a fool of yourself. It's an expensive amusement, and one which you're prone to indulge in. Entering Red Rock for this race was all very well; but to back him pretty stiffly afterwards was downright stupidity. He's a good stout horse, but he's not quick enough for the company you've placed him in."

"He'll stay all the way," replied Mr. Nuthall, "and with your knowledge of pace you're safe to be with them at the finish."

"You are running away with the recollection of that old race I snatched out of the fire with Trumpeter; but you can't expect your antagonists to go off and cut their own throats by making such running as they did

upon that occasion. You know very well I ought not to have won. Talford, who rides Bedouin, is no novice at the game. I have ridden against him before. He is not at all the man to make any mistake of that sort, and this Mamaluke, I hear, is a very smart horse, and anybody who can take an unprejudiced view must acknowledge that Red Rock is hardly that. I shall do the best I can for you, but you'll lose your money this time."

At this instant, a man entered the verandah, at the sight of whom Denton sprang rapidly to his feet.

"My dear Fawcett!" he exclaimed, "how are you? I've never set eyes upon you since the old Arrah days, and, what's more, have never met one of my old comrades on that occasion since. Fetch a chair here, and let's have a talk over old times. One of my brother officers, Mr. Nuthall."

If Fawcett had never heard of Bobby Nuthall, the latter knew him by name very well. The names of the heroes of Arrah, who had held six thousand of the mutineers at bay for a week, were bandied about pretty freely at that time. As for Mr. Nuthall, he had done his work steadily and well, like hundreds of others, but fortune had never vouch-

safed him the opportunity of distinguishing himself.

"Ah! we have heard plenty of you and your doings since then, and I fancy that you have paid the little debt we owed the Sepoys with heavy interest."

"Where's the Judge, and how is Miss Lepel?" inquired Denton.

"The Judge is up in his own district, and fit as a fiddle; but as for Miss Lepel, she is here, staying with the Callanders. I had tiffin with them to-day. She is looking prettier than ever. As for how she is, she will tell you herself if you go and call there."

"I shall only be too glad to do so," replied Denton. "I had no idea she was in Calcutta. I have only been here a few days, and have hardly been outside this establishment during that time. To tell the truth, I feel a little played out, the wheels run down, and all that sort of thing. I am on my way home; but there is such a lot more fellows doing the same thing that it is not quite so easy to get a passage."

"No," said Mr. Nuthall, "I'm afraid you have not much chance for the next two weeks."

"Well, the sooner you're off the better," said Fawcett, who had been carefully study-

ing Denton's face while he was speaking. "I can see that the work has told upon you. By Jove ! you've earned your holiday as well as anyone I know. Quite right, take a run home as soon as you can get away ; six months in England will quite set you up again."

"And how's Cole?"

"He is wonderfully well, and pegging away at his railway in serious earnest again now. I've got a rattling good story against him, which he is not likely to hear the last of in a hurry." Denton had but a slight inkling of Fawcett's talent for romancing during those days at Arrah ; such talk as they had bore mainly upon the matter in hand, and there was little time for story-telling.

"I had gone up to Cole's the other day," said Fawcett, without further preface, "and we were lounging in the verandah about half an hour before dinner, when we saw a man coming rapidly up the drive. 'By Jove,' he exclaimed, 'that's Jack Cotton ; did you ever meet him ? He's an indigo planter in these parts, and a rattling good fellow, but he scorns personal adornment. Just look at his clothes now ! Why, an English scarecrow, with any decent feeling, would be ashamed to be seen in them.' 'Well,' I said, 'I certainly can't

compliment your friend on his attire. ‘No,’ rejoined Cole, ‘did you ever see such a coat? Blessed if I think they would even bid for it in Petticoat Lane!’ By this time the indigo planter had arrived within hail of us, and exclaimed, ‘How are you, Cole? Do you recognise the get up?’ Cole started to his feet, and I saw a queer smile steal over his countenance. ‘Ah, old fellow,’ continued Cotton, ‘I got caught in that last shower, and was drenched to the skin, but I was luckily close to your shanty on the works. I went in, and your people said there was a suit of clothes there which you wore when overlooking. I took advantage of the chance, and just changed suits.’”

“By the way,” continued Fawcett, when the laugh his story had raised had subsided, “I see, by the race card that they have got upstairs, you are riding to-morrow morning; that’s not keeping quiet, you know.”

It had never struck Bobby Nuthall till this moment that there could be anything the matter with his former captain; but now it was made clear to him that there was, he interposed anxiously, and exclaimed:

“Don’t you ride if you’re not up to it. I’d rather lose three times the rupees than you should do yourself any harm.”

"Pooh, Nuts, a two-mile gallop won't hurt me, and I'm only going to ride one race."

"Well," chimed in Fawcett, "don't forget you've taken a precious lot out of yourself during the last two years. It's as well to let your constitution lie fallow a bit after such a strain."

"To see what I can make of Red Rock tomorrow is about the last call I shall make on it for some time," and then they fell to discussing that noble animal's prospects, about which, despite all Denton could say, his owner was sanguine as ever.

The next morning saw quite a little gathering on the Calcutta race course. Although rather an impromptu meeting, not advertised, and got up by a few members of the club at rather short notice, it was still tolerably well known through the city, and society turned out in considerable force to witness the sport. Mrs. Callander was there with her daughters in a comfortable roomy barouche. Miss Lepel was there on horseback, and surrounded by a small staff of admirers, and was speedily joined by Fawcett.

"I met an old friend of yours, Miss Lepel, last night, who intends doing himself the honour of calling on you to-day; he has only been here a few days, and

had no idea you were in Calcutta till I told him."

"Oh! you mean Major Denton," replied Molly. "I shall be indeed pleased to see him. It is close upon two years since we said good-bye to each other, and what a name he has made for himself since!"

"You will see him this morning for certain, and most likely to speak to."

"I know. I see he is to ride this horse of Mr. Nuthall's. By the way, you must know he also is an acquaintance of mine, though the last time we met was in an English ball-room. Bring him to me if you come across him in the course of the morning's proceedings."

"Certainly," replied Fawcett, "and he will doubtless be proud to be recollected, but you must remember at the present moment he is one of those important persons who own race-horses. Like the Laird of Cockpen, just now 'his mind is ta'en up wi' affairs of the state,'"

"When Major Denton has won upon Red Rock, Mr. Nuthall will, perhaps, have leisure to say, 'How do you do?' to an old dancing partner."

"Ah, I'm afraid there is a disappointment in store for that young gentleman. Denton

doesn't in the least expect to win; Nuthall is very sanguine himself, but his jockey is by no means so, and I fancy the latter is the best judge of the two."

"I agree with Mr. Nuthall," replied Molly gaily, "I overheard him say last night that Major Denton was bad to beat, and I think he is, at anything he sets his hand to."

The name of Red Rock's owner on the card, in conjunction with Major Denton's as that animal's rider, had at once recalled to Miss Lepel where and when she had heard Bobby's voice before.

Although there is no ring, there is much private speculation in front of the stand on the Club Sweepstakes, as the principal race of the day is entitled.

Bedouin is a hot favourite for that event; the horse is well-known to the turfites of the Calcutta world, and his rider, Captain Talford's reputation as a horseman stands quite as high as Denton's. Mamaluke, too, has a strong party behind him. Mr. Sherrard, his owner, is well-known as one of the most astute men on the Bengal turf, and though not looked upon as quite so finished a horseman as Talford, is yet reckoned a more than average performer. As for Red Rock, except amongst a few of Mr. Nuthall's immediate

friends, there is little disposition to back him, and he commanded but a low price in the lotteries overnight at the Club. Here and there one or two of those speculators who never can resist investing a little on the chance of a coup, recollecting one or two masterly bits of riding on Mr. Denton's part (as he was then) during his former sojourn in India, placed a little money on Red Rock, but a thousand rupees to eighty was freely proffered, and Mr. Nuthall's good thing was evidently by no means regarded as such by the racing community.

The preliminary races can have no interest for the readers of this history, so we will pass on at once to the *pièce de resistance*. Red Rock, a coarse, bony-looking Waler, certainly did not compare favourably with the neat thorough-bred English Bedouin, or the blood-like looking Barb, Mamaluke. Short time was wasted over the preliminary canter, and the starter despatched the half-dozen at the very first attempt. It was evident to Denton before they had gone a quarter of a mile that Talford and Mr. Sherrard were simply waiting on each other. Now he felt quite certain that both their horses had the foot of him. According to their tactics, the race would not be run till the second mile, even if run the

whole of that ; this would never do, his sole chance with Red Rock lay in wearing his antagonists down. His horse could stay for a week if need be, but was deficient in speed. Denton at once took Red Rock to the front, and made play at as strong a pace as he dared venture. By the time they had gone a mile and a half it was evident that Mr. Nuthall had some grounds for his belief in Red Rock ; but it was palpable that the Waler had galloped three of his antagonists to a standstill, though Bedouin on his right and Mamaluke on his left, as Denton was quite aware, were still hanging to him. At the quarter of a mile post from home, where Nuts had so emphatically predicted that Red Rock would have settled his field, these two on either hand began to close with him. They were really racing now, and tenderly though he rode the Waler, Denton found he could barely live with his antagonists. He knew as far as he was concerned that it was a question of which cracked first. If they were not done with in the next hundred and fifty yards, his horse would be. Suddenly he became conscious of a queer feeling in his head ; things began to spin round with him. They were nearing the stand now ; he had a vague idea that he must keep his place ; his

only chance was that Red Rock might stay the longest. He sat down and began to drive his horse in real earnest; then everything spun round with him. Red Rock from sheer distress swerved right across Bedouin, and his rider lurched helplessly out of the saddle, leaving Mr. Sherrard on Mamaluke to shoot in an easy winner by a couple of lengths on the far side of the course.

There was a rush of people at once to the assistance of the fallen man. The accident had taken place almost opposite the stand, and right in front of all the carriages. Mr. Nuthall had rushed down from the former place in a state of great consternation. His quick eye had detected that it was not the horse's swerve altogether that had unseated Denton, but something more.

When he got on to the course he passed Talford on his way to the weighing room, the latter's boot had been cut clean open against the rails.

"Come and tell me, Nuthall, as quick as you can, how Denton is. He has lost me the race, but I must weigh in at once on the off chance of there being anything wrong with Mamaluke. But this is worse than a fall. Poor Denton must have had a fit, or something of that sort. No horse ever got

out of his iron grip in that fashion before, and I've ridden against him dozens of times, remember."

Mr. Fawcett, too, throwing his reins to a companion, had made his way to the group around the fallen man. A doctor was bending over the sufferer when he arrived there.

"Get a carriage," exclaimed the doctor, "and take him home as quickly as you can. There is nothing broken as far as I can make out; it looks to me like a touch of the sun on a man who has been over-worked for some time."

A carriage was speedily procured and, in charge of the surgeon and Mr. Nuthall, the senseless man was conveyed back to the Bengal Club, where he was staying, and the medical men, for one or two more had come to their *confrère's* assistance, proceeded to examine the patient more closely than had been possible on the race-course; but they all concurred in the first verdict, that it was a case of sun-stroke on a man who had been taxing his resources, both mental and physical, too heavily for some time.

"It's likely to be a bad business," said the surgeon who had been the first to come to Denton's assistance. "Fortunately he seems to have got a good airy room, quiet and the best

of nursing is what he will chiefly require. In the field it would have gone very hard with him, but down here we can, luckily, get heaps of ice, and anything he requires."

"Only tell me what he wants," interposed Nuthall, "and I'll take care he gets it. It's all my fault that he ever rode that brute of a horse at all."

"Oh, we shall pull him through, never fear," rejoined one of the doctors; "but he'll require great care, and you mustn't be surprised to find him light-headed for the next few days."

Miss Lepel was deadly pale as she rode home, and listened to Fawcett's report; nor was the bulletin that he brought round in the afternoon very comforting. Though no longer insensible, Denton could by no means be said to have recovered his senses. He was delirious, and in the words of the American poet, "Wild as a loon."

CHAPTER XV.

“ TWIXT TOMB AND ALTAR.”

MR. NUTHALL devoted himself to taking care of his old captain with the most unstinted attention, and the doctors proved only too correct in their prognostications. Denton was delirious for some days, and talked such wild nonsense and suffered from such phantasies as a man usually does when fighting with an attack of brain fever. He was never still, his tongue never stopped its restless babble. Now he was defying the mutineers at Arrah, now he was cheering on his company to the storming of the Kaiserbagh, and then he was leading his wild troopers in hot pursuit of the flying Sepoys through Oude and Rohilcund, but above it all rang continuous enquiry about Miss Lepel. Where was she? What was she doing? She knew that he had something to say to her, and what was that? He had come all this way to say it, and now he could not recollect what it was. “ You idiots!” he would say to his attendants. “ You fool!” he would exclaim to poor Nut-hall, “ What is it I want to say? you must

know!" and then with a wild wail he would turn his face away, murmuring, "Too late! too late!" only in a few minutes to cry out "Forward, forward, I say! Don't spare your sabres, men, there is no quarter wanted for soldiers who broke faith with those whose salt they have eaten."

As for poor Bobby, the case was almost beyond him. He stuck with unflinching perseverance to the task he had undertaken, and watched over his patient with an assiduity that never tired. He was stung with remorse as he listened to his friend's ravings, and thought that if he had not pestered him to ride Red Rock, this might never have happened. But though he could see the doctor's instructions carried out, and take every care that the sufferer wanted for nothing, yet Nuts had a strong suspicion that when the delirium subsided the case would get a little beyond him.

Miss Lepel sent flowers and inquiries every day. Fawcett, too, was constant in asking after the sick man, and there were plenty of callers daily to know how Major Denton was going on. At length the fever subsided, and, shattered in health, a mere wreck of his former self, and so weak that he could not totter across the room without assistance, the

invalid was once more clothed and in his right mind.

He said very little in these early days of his convalescence ; he dozed away the best part of his time, as men after battling hard on the border-land usually do when struggling back to life. The poor dazed brain refused at first to grapple with what had happened, and sleep and nourishment were the sole things that seemed to interest the sufferer after his fell struggle with the Destroyer in the first instance. But as he recovered strength, he exhibited undue depression, and relapsed into almost unaccountable silence.

"This won't do, Nuthall," said the doctor one morning. "You have shewn yourself a splendid nurse, and we've pulled our man through, but there's something all wrong about him that beats me. He ought to be taking a child-like interest in his convalescence, in his drives, his meals, and all the gossip we bring him, instead of which he is sunk in a dull apathy out of which there seems no rousing him. There's something on his mind, and the first thing we have got to do is to dissipate that illusion, for such it probably is. You were with him through all his ravings. Just think what subject there was that seemed specially to worry him ;

take plenty of time, and if you would rather not confide in me, well, just talk it over with anyone of his intimate friends you think proper."

Thus adjured, Mr. Nuthall betook himself to the verandah, and having ignited a Number One Manilla, sat down to have what he called "a big think." A very little reflection told Nuthall that one of the subjects that had been uppermost in Denton's mind during his delirium was his inability to say something to Miss Lepel, that he was extremely desirous of doing. All that wandering about his old campaigning days surely could not be worrying him now. Bobby recollects that Denton had manifested more interest in Miss Lepel than he could ever call to mind his cynical captain evincing in any young lady; then he remembered that they had been shut up together during the siege of Arrah, and finally Mr. Nuthall came to the conclusion that some misunderstanding with Miss Lepel might be the key to the major's depression.

"I should like to talk this thing over with somebody," he muttered, as he flipped the ash off his cheroot. "And, by Jove! here comes the very man! Just wishing to see you, Mr. Fawcett," observed Nuts, as that gentleman,

taking a seat next him, proceeded to inquire after the invalid.

"Well, that's just where it is!" rejoined Mr. Nuthall, "he don't get on. Of course, after such a shaking as he has had, it is not likely that his mind is very clear about anything. Though he is no longer delirious, I don't think he has quite come to his right senses yet. He is awfully silent, and we can't rouse him; it seems to me as if he can't piece out something to his satisfaction, as if he was struggling hard to recall something to his memory, and can't. Now it's just possible you can give me a hint. Was there ever anything between Denton and Miss Lepel?"

"I can't say positively," replied Fawcett: "They are both proud, self-contained natures, that make very little parade of their feelings. I know at the end of that Arrah business I thought they very likely would come together, but then he went off into all the tumult of the campaign, and they have never met since, I know. But I tell you what, if you've any grounds for supposing so I can help you."

"Well, quite between ourselves," replied Nuthall, "Miss Lepel's name was continually on his lips during his delirium."

"Ah! Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm

a very old friend of her father's, and I'll bring her down here with me on a visit of inquiry, and we shall see what comes of it."

So it was arranged between the two conspirators that the Collector should bring Miss Lepel down to call in a day or two, and as Fawcett remarked, "How far my presence shall extend at their interview must be determined by circumstances." The fact was that Denton's brain was still all misty as regarded the events just preceding his sun-stroke. Did he ride that race? Had he seen Miss Lepel? Had he said to her that which he had it in his mind to say, or had he dreamt all this? What was weighing on the sick man was his perplexity about what was real and what mere visions of his distempered fancy. His mind was like a child's, struggling feebly to understand, and impatient on account of its inability to concentrate itself for more than a few minutes on any subject. It was a pitiful sight to see the strong man so utterly broken down. He, who had possessed nerves of iron and muscles of steel, now started if a book fell from the table, and could hardly totter across the room without assistance. Except his doctor and Mr. Nuthall, and Fawcett once, he had seen nobody as yet. People saluted him when he drove out, but he only stared at

them in a dazed sort of way, and seldom acknowledged their greeting. Like a watch, he had stood at high-pressure tension for some time, but the mainspring had gone at last, and it was just about as much as the doctors could do to repair the machinery. But Fawcett and Nuthall were bent upon trying their experiment, and one morning it was broken to him that the Collector and Miss Lepel would pay him a visit that afternoon. Ah, they had broken through the apathy at last. The dark eyes gleamed with a dash of the old fire at the mention of Molly's name.

"I rather think you've hit it off, Nuthall," said the doctor, who had been narrowly watching his patient when the communication was made to him. "An interview with Miss Lepel will wake him up, I've no doubt. I'll call in again in the evening, and see how he is after it."

Molly was unfeignedly shocked when she first saw him. She knew that he had been at death's door, but she had hardly expected to find him so utterly prostrate as she did. He struggled to rise from his sofa to receive her, but she promptly forbade all that, and drawing a chair to a side of his couch, began to talk gently to him in a low tone about old days. He said very little in reply, but her

voice seemed to soothe him, and no woman could have been blind to the wistful glance with which he regarded her. From that out it became quite part of the daily programme that the sick man should receive a visit from Miss Lepel, and it was quite evident that Molly's presence was a better tonic than all the drugs in the pharmacopæia. Denton began steadily to pick up, and when Fawcett came in late one afternoon to escort his charge back to the Callanders', he found her sitting by the invalid's side, with her hand locked in his.

"Yes, Mr. Fawcett," she said with a smile, "I don't think he will ever get really strong without me, and so I have promised to marry him as soon as he comes back from England to claim me."

THE END.

✓
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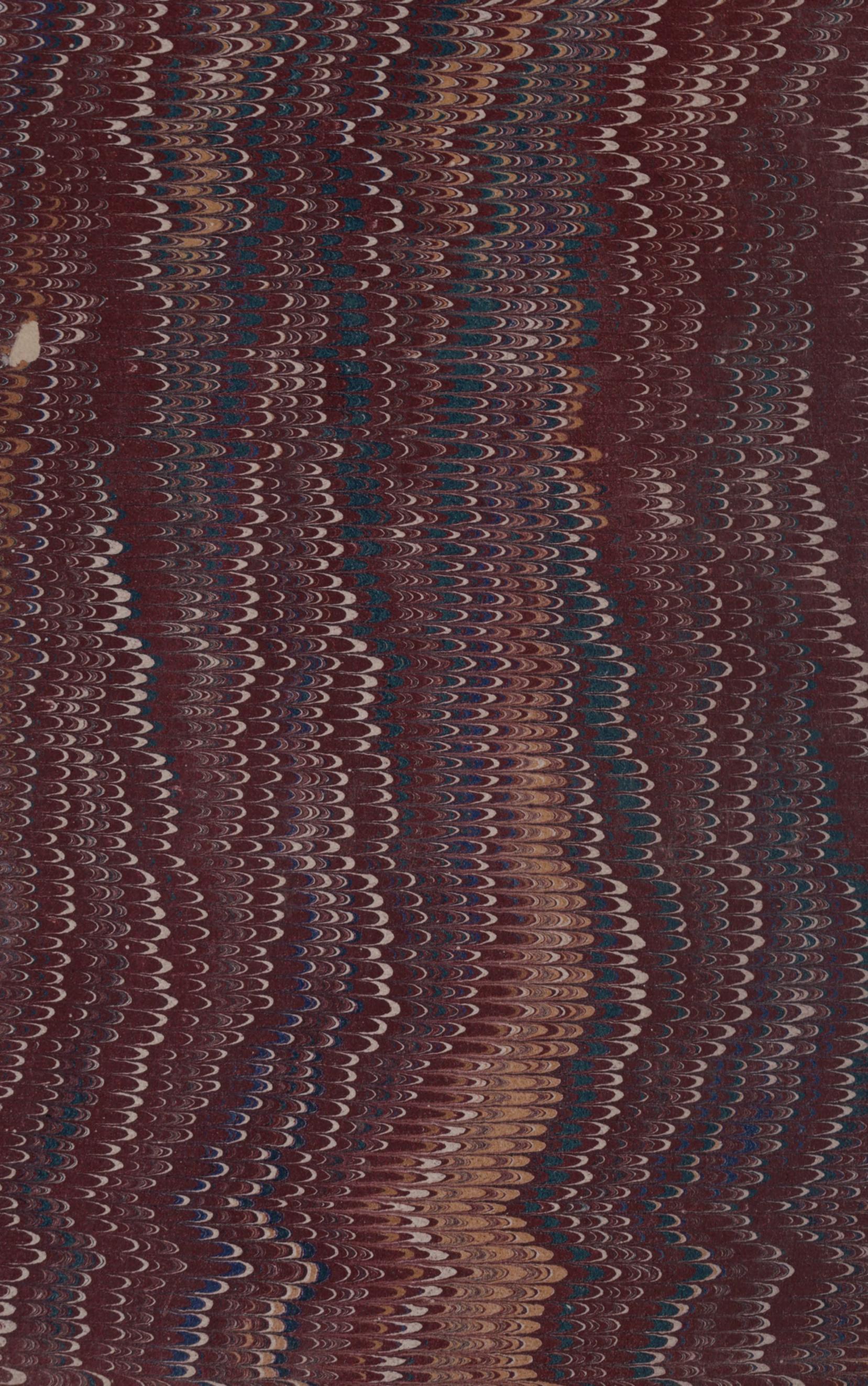
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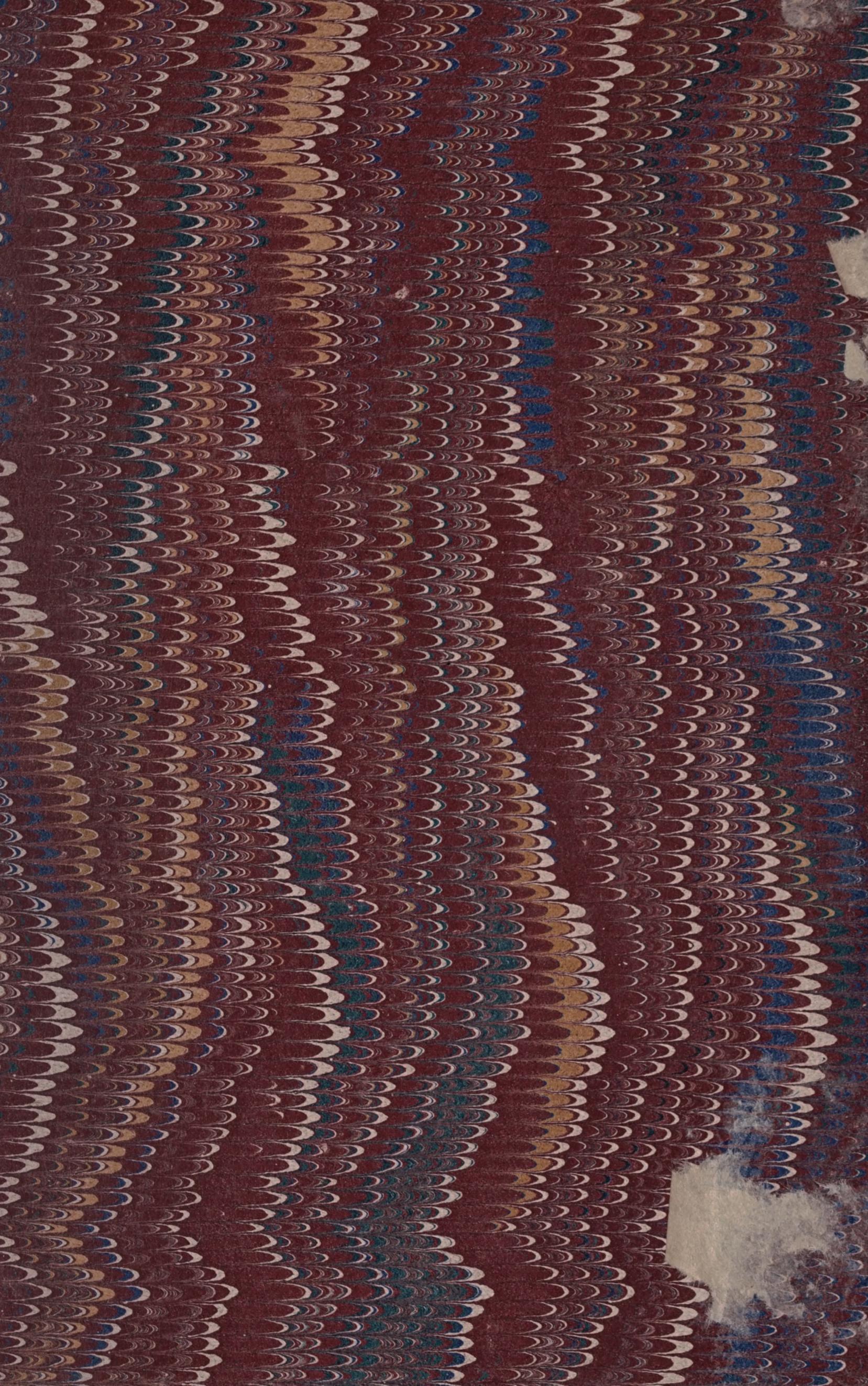
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